

Witches

BUBBLE, BUBBLE, TOIL AND TROUBLE SPLIT THE MAGIC CIRCLES IN BRITAIN



Mrs. Ray Bone runs an old people's home in Tooting Bec, South London.

SHE IS A WITCH



Mrs. Pat Crowther, 33, a dancer from Sheffield, has just finished an Isle of Wight summer show.

SHE IS A WITCH



Mrs. Monique Wilson, 38, married to an ex-R.A.F. flight lieutenant, lives in the Isle of Man.

SHE IS A WITCH

THREE three women are high priestesses in the centuries-old cult of witchcraft (Anglo-Saxon: Wicca, wise one).

It is currently enjoying a big revival in Britain—and split with internal troubles.

Outsiders may find witchcraft amusing. But those in witchcraft, always referred to as "the craft," take a more serious view.

No one knows exactly how many people are practising the cult. Some say 600, some say 6,000. There is no way of checking on the covens meeting regularly throughout the country (magic circles are

often drawn in chalk on lounge carpets).

An attempt is being made to form a Witchcraft Research Association to link covens. A quarterly witchcraft review, *Pentagram*, has just been launched. A witches dinner is being held in a London hotel on Saturday.

Why then, with the fascination of witchcraft holding more and more people spellbound, should it be riven with disension?

The key to the rows lies in the death earlier this year of white-haired, white-bearded Dr. Gerald Brousseau Gardner, 80, thought by many to be Britain's leading witch.

On the morning of February 12 he was on board the Scottish Prince off the North African coast en route from Limassol, Cyprus, to Tunis.

Dr. Gardner finished his toast and marmalade, began reading a book on magic and collapsed across the breakfast table. He was dead before he could be carried to his cabin.

In his will he left the bulk of his £21,688 estate (including ownership of his Isle of Man witchcraft museum and two cottages) to two Scottish witches, Mrs Monique Wilson and her husband, Campbell, 41.

This caused Split Number One.

The Wilsons were living in a Perth pre-fab when they heard of Gardner's death. Three days later Mrs Wilson flew to the island and took over the doctor's cottage and museum.

Mr. Wilson, who sports black leather trousers, found that with his new fortune he need no longer work. His wife, self-styled Witch Queen, began acting as a witches' advice bureau, answering dozens of letters a week from other witches.

The couple regard themselves as Gardner's heirs in the craft.

Mr. Wilson says he and his wife have taken the late doctor's place. Other witches violently disagree. One said last week: "As far as we're concerned the Wilsons just don't exist."

Mrs. Wilson's name as a witch is the Lady Olwen. She is French-born (birthplace: Halphong, Indo-China), met her husband when he was stationed in Hongkong after the war. They returned to Britain in 1954, joined British witchcraft through Gardner, who paid frequent visits to their pre-fab in Nemmo-avenue, Perth.

Witches and trainee witches (the course, free, can take from three months to a year) fly to the Isle of Man to take part in the Wilsons' coven. They are held in Gardner's old stone cottage in Malew-street, Castletown, where the couple live (their phone number is ex-directory).

All believe in the witchcraft creed: *Perfect love, perfect trust and harm no one.*

They are upset when people compare witchcraft with Black Magic. Witchcraft, they insist, strives only to do good whereas Black Magic aims at conjuring up evil spirits.

The Wilsons usually have three-thirteen naked people in their magic circle drawn in Gardner's old study, reached through the bathroom. ("We had 17 in the circle once, a bit crowded but we managed.")

They believe they can help people who write to them.

When there is no time to call a full coven Mr. and Mrs.

NEWSIGHT



DR. GARDNER

Death—then trouble

Wilson go into their circle on their own. Help is sometimes requested via urgent-rate telegram.

A month ago they heard of a man in California who was not expected to live. They went upstairs to the magic room and concentrated. It was a Monday. The man walked out of the hospital on the Wednesday.

"I get goose-pimples when I think about it," says Mrs. Wilson. "I was so pleased."

Mrs. Wilson says she has been a witch most of her life. Both sides of her family, she adds, had the power.

Another current row among British witches is over publicity seekers. One of these is a New Forest witch, Mrs. Sybil Leek, 42.

Mrs. Leek is now on her second lecture tour of the U.S.

In letters home she says she is doing television and radio work on witchcraft, and has signed for a series of 39 TV shows. She has a Press Officer and has turned herself into a company, Sybil Leek Inc. She never travels without her tame jackdaw (Hoffoot Jackson) perched on her shoulder.

Mrs. Leek has upset many witches who believe secrecy is essential in witchcraft. She counters: There is nothing to hide in White Magic; it is Black Magic that is wicked.

Another witch accused of seeking publicity is Mrs. Ray Bone, of Tooting Bec, South London. Her witch name is Artemis which, she says, was one of the mother goddesses.

Mrs. Bone describes herself as a sort of coven liaison officer. She feels a lot of nonsense is written about witchcraft. None of the covens she knows uses wax images and pins, she says. Her husband, Bill, a sheet-metal worker, takes no part in ceremonies.

Another witch is Mrs. Crowther, of Sheffield. She has often been in the public eye. She was left £3,000 in

Dr. Gardner's will and has written books on witchcraft.

When she practises in her coven she wears only a garter of green leather and blue silk. The garter is decorated with buckles, one for each coven she controls.

A constant source of wrangling in the witchcraft world is the Witches Mill at Castle-town. Gardner turned it into a tourist attraction.

Gardner's partner in running the exhibition was Bill Worrall, 43, who expected to inherit the museum when the doctor died.

Some witches feel that Gardner let Worrall down by not leaving him the museum outright after his nine years as manager. Some side with the Wilsons.

Worrall ("I'm Christian and take no part in witchcraft") and his wife Louise, 43, are still running the museum (adults 1s., children 6d., witch hats 2s.) and restaurant (meat pies 6d., homemade scones up 1d. to 6d.).

The biggest split among British witches is in the difference in outlook between the followers of Gardner (the Wilsons, Crowthers, Mrs. Bone and a St. Albans witch called Jack Braelen) and an older element who refuse to declare themselves.

A 35-year-old London Press Relations consultant, who uses the pseudonym John Math (taken from a Welsh legend, Math vab Mathonwy) claims he is in constant touch with the older people.

He is trying to pull the two sides together. He started the witchcraft review *Pentagram* and organised Saturday's dinner (two guineas including wines).

He is contemptuous of witches who attended a lecture last February by an American professor, Dr. Rossell Hope-Robbins, debunking witchcraft.

He has sent out nearly 400 copies of his newsletter with subscription forms and has so far received 200-300 replies. His proposed Witchcraft Research Association aims at patching the rifts in witchery.

He hopes to make progress at Saturday's dinner party.

Some local authorities are running witchcraft courses this autumn (City Literary Institute, Holborn, 25s.; Pendrell Hall College near Wolverhampton, Staffordshire, 15s.).

When there was a move to have witchcraft banned Mr. Henry Brooke, the Home Secretary reminded the Commons that witchcraft ceased to be a criminal offence in 1735. He had no intention, he said, of bringing in fresh legislation 228 years later.

Witchcraft, whatever you may think of it, lingers on. It is free to flourish in Britain.

WITCH FACTS

The last witch execution in Britain was in 1684 (Alice Molland, hanged at Exeter). Witches were always hanged for witchcraft in this country (burned for treason or heresy). The last recorded witch trial in Britain was in 1711. Several women were sent to prison and the pillory. Witchcraft ceased to be a statutory or ecclesiastical offence in 1735 when the Witchcraft Act was passed. In the previous 70 years witches were being hanged in Britain at the rate of about 25 a year.

WITCH BELIEFS

Witches believe in holding coven meetings naked in a magic circle ("a strange spiritual power exudes from the naked body, you could cripple yourself wearing clothes"); worshipping the Goddess of Fertility; Reincarnation; The Book of Shadows (witchcraft's equivalent to the Bible); secret rituals and symbols (example: The Pollate Mask, representing the King of the Woods, his face decorated with leaves); magical mirrors, convex and backed with black paint instead of silvering (for conjuring up magical visions).