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Amazing black magic rites on Cheshire hillside

"DEAD MAN" COMES TO LIFE, JOINS WITCHES

SHOCK 'CHRONICLE-NEWS' PROBE: CLERGY ATTACK

By DAVID DUFFY

FOR more than 45 fantastic minutes I sat blindfold, with my hands tied behind my back, and listened to the chant of a high priest as he initiated a witch into his coven.

Burning incense penetrated the midnight air and a chill wind swept the hillside at Alderley Edge, the famous Cheshire beauty spot. It was the "Festival of the Full Moon."

Only feet from where I was sitting—the very spot where the Wizard of Alderley practised his ancient cult centuries ago—was a magic circle surrounded by lighted candles, shielded from the wind with ferns.

In the centre of the magic circle lay a man purporting to be a "dead man." He was swathed in a white sheet, his face covered by a golden mask. On his chest lay a sword, a wand, and a thigh bone said to be that of a Knight Templar. Near by the head of a steel spear pierced the ground.

This was the amazing scene I saw when finally the high priest—36-year-old Alex Sanders—gave the order for my blindfold to be removed.

Clouds cast eerie shadows as Sanders said: "The 'dead man' on the ground is now a witch. When he rises he will be a man born again, with the powers to perform magic."

I challenged Sanders, who I can reveal has been practising witchcraft rituals on the Edge for 12 months, to reveal the initiate's identity.

He refused, "to protect him from any ridicule from his family and friends," he said.

The vow of allegiance

EARLIER, in company with photographer Stan Royle and picture editor Jack Abell, we had gone to the secret rendezvous at Alderley Edge. Before the ceremony and in

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order to see what was going on, we had to agree first to be blindfolded.

Sanders told us: "You will be able to listen to the rituals, but because they are secret we cannot allow you to witness them."

Even our hands were tied in case we were tempted to pull away the blindfolds and see what Sanders and his friends were up to.

During the "ceremony" Sanders, who described himself as "High Priest," spoke in a barbaric tongue. Bells were rung and the initiate repeated a vow of allegiance to the cult.

Then, after their gods were summoned from the four points of the compass, the new witch received his "magic tools"—the knife, a sword, a wand, and a spearhead.

Suddenly it was over. The initiate rose and lit a cigarette.

Then Sanders talked of how he sacrificed his marriage to practise witchcraft.

Power to cast spells

OUR marriage went on the rocks almost overnight. My wife objected to me worshipping in the nude, as we do on occasions, because there are three women in my coven.

"But I have no regrets. I am a healer, and practising witchcraft is all important to me. We do perform magic and have the power to cast spells, but we do no harm to anyone.

Sanders, an odd-job man in a



● On a slope at Alderley Edge a "dead man" takes part in a witchcraft initiation ceremony... dressed in white, wearing a golden mask with pictures of a god and goddess at his head and feet, and a sword, spearhead, and bone of a Knight Templar on and near his "body."



● Candles burn around the magic circle as High Priest Alex Sanders performs a phase of the initiation ceremony to make a "dead man" a witch. In the background the Edge.



● Part of the "opening of the mouth" ceremony on the "dead man" as High Priest Alex Sanders bends to say magic words.

WITCHES' CEREMONY

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Manchester library, lives in lodgings in Oldham Road, Newton Heath.

He added: "Through our cult, which has its origin 5,000 years ago, we try to seek a peaceful mind. I have been a witch since I was seven, my grandmother was High Priestess and she initiated me."

On New Year's Day, the "Festival of the Yule," Sanders, who now has 10 witches in his coven, says he plans to marry his "High Priestess," a 32-year-old woman from Nottingham.

"We would be married by ancient ritual," he said.

Back to the sixteenth century

AFTER reading this report, the Rev. C. A. Shaw, vicar of St. Ambrose Church, Pendleton, Salford to-day attacked witchcraft and said: "The Church of England would say immediately that witchcraft is complete and utter nonsense."

"From the description you have given me of the midnight initiation I would say that this is the type of thing I can imagine might have taken place in Lancashire in the 16th century."

"I think there is a strong psychological influence behind the people who practise witchcraft. They are children who have not grown up and are looking for an outlet."

The Rev. J. A. Dean, minister of Bramhall Congregational Church, said: "I feel the practising of witchcraft is misguided. It may be a modern way of achieving a new sensation, but their feelings have run away with their reasoning."

A Stretford Roman Catholic priest said: "The practice is stupid and in these modern times I cannot see any sense in it."