



SHE'S A
Witch!

Lois Pearson: "My grandmother was a witch. So am I."

'Now I will lose my job' says girl who revels in nude rites

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By PETER BISHOP

OUTSIDE a tumbledown cottage in a wood near Watford, in Hertfordshire, I challenged a 27-year-old girl to admit that she is a witch.

"Oh, I'll lose my job over this," Thelma Capel blurted out.

"Don't you use this cottage as a temple in which to practise pagan rites?" I insisted.

"Isn't it a fact that you and 30 other men and women dance in the nude when you meet to worship the god and goddess of fertility?"

"Yes," she said at last. "It's all true. I am a witch. I have practised witchcraft for many years."

And then this slender, attractive girl, who is private secretary to the managing director of a Watford firm, made a confession that brought to an end my investigation into the strange and scandalous affair of the witches of Hertfordshire.

Their names

I can name three other members of this repulsive sect whose "religion" permits free love and which recognises the sex act as a form of worship.

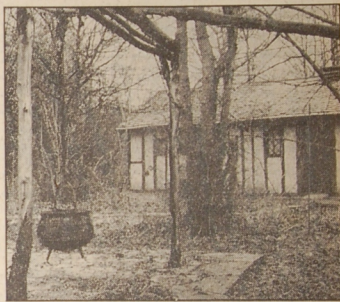
There is the "high priest," Jack Bracein, a 32-year-old sales representative who lives at Elm Avenue, Swiss Cottage, London.

There is 27-year-old Fred Lamond, a market research worker, who shares a flat with Bracein.

And there is Tanith the "witch maiden," whose real name is Lois Pearson. She is 29 years old and she lives at Amphill, near Bedford.

HEATHEN TEMPLE

The cottage where the witches perform their heathen rites. Outside, a cauldron.



in pagan ceremonies for the last ten years.

He claimed that the company was registered "in case we wanted to publish any of our research work into pagan religion and witchcraft."

So far, no such "research work" has seen the light of day.

Indeed, the witches of Watford have been careful to keep their pagan ceremonies a close secret.

"For hundreds of years witches have been hounded and persecuted," said Thelma Capel.

'We are shy'

"A witch was burned at the stake in Mexico as recently as 1953. Can you wonder that we shy away from publicity?"

Yet they dare to call their heathen cult "religion."

And they have had the effrontery to register their temple as a

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EXPOSED—the pagan sect with a temple in a wood

They worship sex in secret



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place of worship. I have seen the form sent to the local Registrar in St. Albans.

It describes the cottage in Bricket Wood as "The Ancient British Church" and the "congregation" as "undenominational."

It was in the bungalow alongside the witches' den that Thelma Capel made her full confession to me.

First she showed me a tiny figure, moulded in clay, of a naked goddess.

"This is 1,600 years old," she said. "It comes from Cyprus. The ancient witches there worshipped it as a symbol of fertility. So do we."

Then she explained how the members of the Hertfordshire coven carry out their fertility worship.

In the one stone-flagged room of the cottage the members first strip off all their clothes.

Candles are lit. Thelma Capel, as high priestess, then grasps a black-handled knife and draws an imaginary circle on the floor.

Inside the circle the witches chant and dance. Incense is burned to excite the dancers into frenzy.

At the centre of the circle stands a table as an "altar." On it for the ceremony are laid knives, jars of oil and braided silk cord.

The "high priestesses" refused to say what exactly is done with

these objects during the nude ceremonial dancing.

"That is a secret that has been guarded for centuries," she said.

"All I can tell you is that we witches worship the life force. We conjure up power at our ceremonies.

"The powers emanate from our bodies. That is why we are unclothed. Clothes would stifle our emanations."

It was Jack Braceln who made the further admission that the

● Left, Jack Braceln and Thelma Capel, the "high priestess" and "high priestesses." Right, a naked ceremonial dance in progress—a remarkable picture that the witches posed for.

In the centre stands the pagan "altar." One of the dancers brandishes a knife. As the "worshippers" circle round, incense is burned to excite them to a frenzy.

witchcraft "code" permits couples to pair off as an act of worship at the end of the monthly ceremony, though it rarely happened.

I went out to survey the witches' temple. In the cottage a white circle is painted on the floor to guide the members when they form up for their ceremonies.

Outside the cottage there is a paved square, the centre of which is charred where countless fires have been lit.

A wooden frame over this spot supports a metal hook on which there hangs a huge cauldron. For in summer the witches perform their secret ceremonies in the open.

From the cottage I travelled to Ampthill, near Bedford, to confront Lois Pearson.

'Never so happy'

"My Spanish grandmother was a witch," she said. And defiantly she added, "So am I. I have never been so happy since I discovered the coven and became a member."

As a witch she said she did not recognise the sanctity of marriage. She believes, like them, that she has powers brought into play by pagan ceremonies.

Each member of the coven whom I traced and interviewed showed every sign of believing in this diabolical rubbish about gods of fertility, the supposed virtues of dancing naked and the worship of sex.

I only hope that Jack Braceln was wrong when he claimed that there are 400 practising witches in Britain.

'Clothes would hamper us in our ceremony'