

"Weekend
Telegraph"
June 17th, 1966.

The witches are ready for Thursday

But the practitioners who will be celebrating Midsummer will not all be jumping over flames in couples, naked for easier spirit-emanation. The Magicians may end a month's abstinence with a burst of Latin, and Druids of all grades will be at Stonehenge (the higher grades, from OO, help man to control his life). By ANDREW DUNCAN



DRUIDISM, like witchcraft, is split into groups. The Stonehenge Druids were left last year by the breakaway Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, who will celebrate the summer solstice on Tuesday at Parliament Hill, London. Last year they went to Hunsbury Hill, outside Northampton. "Stonehenge is polluted," says their leader, Mr Ross Nichols

WE are approaching National Spirit Week. The height of the summer season for genies, fairies, gods, and things that go bump in the night begins on Monday, when some Druids leave London by coach for Stonehenge and their annual summer-solstice ceremony.

On Thursday, Midsummer's Eve, pairs of witches will jump naked over bonfires chanting a traditional ditty:

Eko, eko, azarak
Eko, eko, zomelak,
Eko eko, gannymas,
Eko, eko, arrida.

"It doesn't actually *mean* anything," a High Priestess told me, "but it's rhythmic and good for dancing."

Druids, witches and magicians—the main Midsummer celebrants—perform ancient rites with many basic similarities. Most of it is harmless scampering about, a folksy climax to beliefs rooted in mediaevalism and invested with secrecy.

They attract a surprisingly large cross-section of people. A London coven has two housewives, a surveyor, solicitor, and two Civil Servants

amongst its members. Newcomers to the British Circle of the Universal Bond (as some Druids call themselves) include a bulldozer-driver, a teacher, telephonist, architect, court clerk and cabaret artist.

"We never recruit," says Chief Druid Dr Thomas Maughan. "When people can't find what they want from life they come to us. Our beliefs are compatible with all religions, but a real Druid doesn't believe anything. He builds steadily on what he *knows*."

How does he know? "He tests everything."

Of course, tests can produce varying results, and last year some Druids formed a breakaway group known as the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids. Mr Ross Nichols, who calls himself the Chosen Chief, says: "We declared a separate working, which we have a constitutional right to do. Numbers don't count, but we have more of the sounder members with us."

The OBOD spurn Stonehenge. "I think it's a polluted place," says Mr Nichols. "The Ministry of Works have put down a whole lot of gravel, and

it's surrounded with barbed wire." Says Dr Maughan: "They're trying to cash in on the apparent popularity of the Druids."

Druidism seems to be realism muted with symbolism. "Advanced Druids are taught the philosophy of convenience," explains Dr Maughan.

On payment of two guineas' annual subscription, anyone can enter the first phase—the Gatehouse. "At the moment we are more or less gathering them in from the highways and byways," says Dr Maughan, who practised medicine in the East. "There used to be a higher percentage of quality admitted."

INCENSE and incantations create atmosphere at initiations, where new members are told not to look for advantage in this world or even the next—but to be a useful tool for evolution. "The Druid believes in the continuous life," says Dr Maughan, who declined to give his age in this life, but admitted he had been a Druid in a previous existence.

Meanwhile, initiates learn to master

The witches



Peter Keen

THE CHIEF DRUID, Dr Thomas Maughan, relaxes over a glass of home-made wine with Ovate-Og-level Druid Muriel Jennings at his home in Dulwich. Each Druid grade has its own secrets—to avoid confusion on the way up

their present circumstances. Before leaving the Gatehouse they must free themselves from debt and become self-sufficient. They then enter the Seven Kings phase, where they free themselves of the domination of the body. Having mastered that, they are Ovate Ogs (OO), and admitted into the inner circle. "Really, you've squared yourself, and are coming up to the starting line," says Dr Maughan. "That's when you begin to learn things."

OO Miss Muriel Jennings, 25, who works for a film company, says: "I came to Druidery through reading philosophy. We all may go around with long faces, but enjoyment is the keynote."

There are about 30 Universal Bond Druids in London, who hold fortnightly groves (meetings). "They are ritualistic ceremonies designed to get people beyond the domination of the flesh," says Dr Maughan. "An artificial world is created where each member acts a part. The silly man goes out into the world and makes his mistakes. It's better to make them in a laboratory where they can be settled between you and your God."

Each group of UB Druids is an autonomous body, but an annual general meeting is held at Dr Maughan's Dulwich house to choose officers for the summer-solstice ceremony.

"Stonehenge has the same significance as a cathedral," says Dr Maughan. "Popes and prelates are the lowest category, in using a gorgeous ornamentation of human luxury."

On Monday night these Druids will have a vigil, preparing themselves mentally for the ceremony of hailing the dawn. "In the old days we were waiting for the dawn of intelligence; now it's the dawn of wisdom," says Dr Maughan.

After the dawn ceremony they have breakfast at a local hotel, and then rehearse for their High Noon ceremony. Meanwhile, the OBOD will make for Parliament Hill, Highgate. The two groups dispute the correct day for solstice observance, but basic equipment is the same: white shoes, white robe and white bonnet. The public are encouraged to watch, but not mock.

Witches are more security-conscious, because they feel spells are weakened by unsympathetic witnesses. Hence, the Rollright Stone, outside Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire, has declined in favour because motorists on a nearby road would lean out of car windows and shout, "Lovely night for the witches, then".

The two witch sects—white and black—hold festivities, but schisms in the cult prevent any set formula. White witches are celebrating the masculine element in the Life Force on Midsummer's Eve. The idea is to stimulate the sun's energy at the beginning of its downward course.

HIGH PRIESTESSES who can withstand cold usually require their coven to undress for easier spirit-emanation. Women wear a necklace to symbolise the unbroken circle of eternity.

"What happens if it rains?" I asked Mrs Ray Bone, a High Priestess who runs a rest home for old folks in Streatham. "It never rains then, dear," she said.

Nevertheless, some covens, like the one operated by 36-year-old Mrs Patricia Crowther in Sheffield, have access to indoor circles. Mrs Crowther has a special room upstairs at her home. "But we like to get outside if the weather's nice," she says.

First, the High Priestess draws a circle in the earth with her athame

The witches



Peter Keen

THIS WITCH—High Priestess Thelema (real name: Mrs Patricia Crowther)—claims 90 per cent. of her spells succeed. She runs a coven from her Sheffield home. "The neighbours don't mind. I don't complain about them going to church"

(a black-handled knife). Then she invokes the Mighty Ones of the Four Quarters to guard the circle and observe the rites.

A fire is lit in the middle (to stimulate the sun) and the High Priestess goes to the east corner by the altar. A cauldron of water, purified with salt, and garnished with herbs to the High Priestess's taste, is either boiled or placed at the altar. Incense is used to consecrate the circle. "I usually use lavender, although sandalwood is very nice," says Mrs Crowther.

Then coven members stand in a circle while the High Priestess invokes the sun to give "fair woodlands, green fields, and uprising corn". Next she tells them to dance around the cauldron of Cerridwen (an old Celtic Mother-Goddess), chanting, as she sprinkles them with water. Gradually the tempo of the chant increases, and coven members jump over the bonfire in couples. This is to stimulate the life-giving force.

After that, there is a picnic. "When they're successful they do it on the grand scale: champagne and smoked salmon. It's like a social evening in Hampstead. If it's a couple of poor old souls on pensions, they'll be pleased with Swiss roll and Nescafé from the Co-op," says Mr Cecil Williamson, who runs a Museum of Witchcraft at Bourton on the Water in Gloucestershire.

BLACK WITCHES sometimes have the same sort of ceremony, except they dance anti-clockwise and invoke evil spirits. "It's a very personal thing between them and the spirit world," says Mr Williamson. "They always have a thank-you cere-

mony, because they feel the spirits will get brassed off with them if they don't.

"There are so many brands of witchcraft that everyone cries stinking fish at the other. The average (black) witch is in it to keep the bread on her table and a roof over her head. She will have between 350 and 400 basic clients to whom she sells protection at about a guinea a year. But she keeps turning up, inquiring about the family—and by protecting them too she's going to jack it up to £7 10s by the end of the year."

Magicians also work at Midsummer. "He'd have bathed and perfumed himself, may have abstained from carnal pleasures for a month and gone on a special diet," says Mr Williamson. "He would deliver a flowery recitation, maybe in Latin—not much different from a special university speech."

But for those who want a more active Midsummer's Eve, some recommended recipes are:

DIG under the root of a mugwort and you will find a coal that saves you from carbuncle, the quartan plague, and burning.

Gather three grains of fern seed at midnight and you will be able to summon anyone who ever lived.

Don't sit under a hawthorn bush in case you're carried off by the spirits.

Young girls who pluck St-John's-wort, a yellow flower, before the dew is off will be certain of marriage within a year.

Young girls throwing hemp seed over their left shoulders at midnight in a churchyard will see their future husband walking behind them with a scythe (not to be confused with Old Father Time).