



CEREMONY OF CROWNING THE SWORD

Thelema, High Priestess of Witchcraft, performs the secret ceremony of the crowning of the sword.

Holding the sword is another member of the Sheffield coven who has a famous ancestor, the old Scottish witch Maggie Wall, burned in Perth in the 17th century.

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INCENSE BURNS, candles flicker . . . and within the nine-foot magic circle Thelema, high priestess of witchcraft, leads the dance to raise the cone of power.

This will be the scene tomorrow night as witches from Leeds, Brighton and Manchester join with Sheffield witches to celebrate the mystical festival of Hallowe'en.

And while Sheffield sleeps, they will perform the secret rites of worship to the Horned God of Death and the Mother Goddess of Fertility.

Broad descriptions—but no secrets — I heard from Thelema, or to use her electoral roll name Mrs. Patricia Crowther, as I talked in the front room of her City Road home.

Ageless

Even the room was heavy with mystery, with ancient statues of Greek, Roman and Egyptian deities taking pride of place.

"Our god and goddess were worshipped under many different names throughout

history," said Mrs. Crowther, "but we keep their names secret.

"Our religion is ageless and timeless and for me those hours in the circle are something wonderful.

"We can escape from the hectic pace of modern life and return to the time of peace when there was no conception of good and evil.

"I prefer our religion to be called the Old Religion rather than witchcraft, because it has none of the un-

pleasant implications which the name witchcraft has.

"For so long we have been condemned as wicked, but this is not so.

Belief

"We work only for good, and we have helped many people."

She added: "Each week we have requests for help from all sorts of people."

Both Mrs. Crowther and her husband, Arnold, who is

a high priest, told me the various covens throughout England are investigating the possibility of amalgamating in some way.

A fascinating person with whom to talk, 36-year-old Mrs. Crowther is far removed from the usual conception of a witch.

She is slender and willowy. Long blonde hair cascades on to her shoulders. And she is an extremely happy person.

Like all witches, she believes in re-incarnation and says that through hypnotism she has seen into her past lives.

"At least, I think they were mine," she said.

"I think that I was once Philippa Towin of Gosport, and I used to go to church three times every Sunday and have a black pony.

"The church was called St. John's, and we have since discovered that a church of this name was built in Gosport in the early sixteenth century.

"Also I was Polly the Witch, and I recited many spells which my husband took down.

"They were all in rhyme, which normally I can't do, and they included spells for making a husband whose affections were straying return to his wife."

Feast

She added: "Ours is a positive religion with strong moral standards and principles.

"Although we get many people wanting to join, we accept very few.

"We have to be completely sure of their sincerity, because when we step into the circle we have to have a bond of unity between us.

"I draw the circle with the athame, the witches' knife, and consecrate it.

"This keeps the good in and the evil outside. So we must feel very close to those within."

She would tell me no more of the secret rites of Hallowe'en—the feast of the dead when people used to think of their departed loved ones and hope to communicate with them.

"To speak of our secret is to lose it," she said.

IT'S A NIGHT FOR THE WITCHES!

by ANGELA STORER