

today claim to be active followers of witchcraft. It is not, they insist, an excuse for orgies.

"Witchcraft is a religion," declares a 1963 housewife, "the oldest religion in the world . . ."

WITCHES BUT



Patricia Crowther, present-day witch

On a vast wall of rock in the dark depths of a subterranean cavern in southern France is the portrait of a god. The oldest god in the world. Older than the Bible. Older than Egypt. Older than Babylon.

Painted on the rock is a weird, primitive picture of a bearded man with large, staring eyes. His body is wrapped in the skin of a wild animal, antlers sprout from his head.

The portrait is at least 10,000 years old. Yet a little old lady recently received me in a country hospital amid the peaceful fields of Hertfordshire and solemnly declared, "That same god is being worshipped by witches in Britain today."

THE fragile figure in a pale green dressing gown—a brown mohair shawl tucked behind her head, a white woolly blanket wrapped around her legs—had the ageless tranquillity of a woman on the far side of her hundredth birthday. Her eyes were bright and alert in a face with all the mellowness of carefully preserved parchment.

This was Dr. Margaret Alice Murray, one of the modern world's greatest authorities on the mysteries of witchcraft.

It was in 1921 that Dr. Murray, already a distinguished Egyptologist and one of the first women dons at London University,

10 CLUES TO WITCHCRAFT

1. HOW TO SPOT A WITCH

Look for a man or woman with a bracelet on their wrist. It is likely to be large and wide, made of silver, bronze or copper and will have weird signs and symbols engraved on it.

thought of witches as an interesting but unimportant body of hysterics and eccentrics. But Dr. Murray caused a sensation by suggesting that this view was as false as the popular idea of them as the hideous old crones, who, with their pointed hats, broomsticks, black cats and evil spells, were the legendary villainesses of fairy-tales.

The witch cult, she said then, was really the survival of a pre-Christian religion as old as man. Forty-two years later she sat in her hospital room and still insisted, "It must be the oldest religion in the world. It goes back to the Old Stone Age—and beyond that, to the very beginning of things. . . ."

The cave painting in southern France is at the Caverne des Trois Frères near Ariège. "It is essentially a religious drawing," explained Dr. Murray. "It is of a man dressed ritually to represent the beast-god. He is performing a magical fertility rite, a sacred dance which

2. THE GREEN MAN

If your local is a real old inn, or is on the site of an old one of the same name, and is called The Green Man, then it is probable that the Horned God of the Woods was once worshipped in your district.

he believes will increase the numbers of the animals he hunts.

"Nobody has ever been able to trace the path by which he first came to be worshipped in Britain. But we do know that he was venerated as Amon in ancient Egypt and as Pan, the woodland goat god, in Greece. Here in Britain he acquired many different names, like Herne, Old Hornie, Puck, the Green Man and Old Nick."

The shade of the Horned God of the Woods lingers on in the name of many an old country inn called the Green Man, and to this day the legend of Herne the Hunter survives. An awe-inspiring spectral figure, crowned with gigantic stag's horns, he is still reputed to roam the leafy glades of Windsor Great Park.

Most of the time he is invisible, but when he is seen his appearance is said to herald a calamity for the Royal Family or the nation. He was reported to have been sighted just before the outbreak of the First World War, and again before the disastrous economic crisis of 1931.

And we all know who Old Nick is!

"That," said Dr. Murray, "is a very important point. You see, when the Christian missionaries came to Britain they condemned the Horned God whom they found the Britons worshipping. They said he was a false god, the enemy of the Christian God of salvation, and they called him the Devil."

And that is how the Devil got his horns, cloven hoofs and tail. Old Nick is essentially a British invention. Nowhere in the scriptures will you find Satan described as looking like that.

Dr. Murray always insisted that the ancient witch cult was *not* Satanism. Neither was it a

3. COVEN MEETINGS

If you live in an area where there are prehistoric stone circles or standing stones, and witchcraft is practised in your district, it is possible that the coven meets at these ancient sites. The time rites are most likely to take place is at midnight on Hallowe'en (October 31), Candlemas (February 2), May Eve (April 30) and Lammis (August 1).

revelling in evil nor the practice of black magic, she declared.

"But remember," she told me as I was about to leave her hospital room, "I have studied the witch cult. I know nothing of the people who claim to be witches today. You must find yourself a witch if you want to know any more."

Finding a witch in Britain of 1963 is not too difficult if you know where to look. Within two days of leaving Dr. Murray I was having tea with thirty-two-year-old Patricia Crowther in a cosy grey stone house on a windy hill above Sheffield.

Patricia claims to be one of Britain's thousand practising witches. She is certainly

4. SNAIL SHELLS

Snail shells stuck to trees by pins are almost certain signs that a white witch is at work. To rub a wart with a live snail and then pin it to an oak or ash tree is an age-old magical formula for curing warts.

nothing like the traditional nutcracker-jawed old hag of witch legends. She is tall, slender and wears her golden hair long and loose-flowing. Her husband, Arnold, also admits to being a witch and it was he who first introduced Patricia to witchcraft seven years ago.

"Arnold took me to meet Dr. Gerald

"Everywoman", November, 1963.

NO BROOMSTICKS

Gardner who has a fascinating Witches Museum at Castletown in the Isle of Man," she explained. "Dr. Gardner is one of the senior practising witches in the country and what he told me set me making inquiries. "I soon discovered that Sunday newspaper

5. HOLEY STONES

Holey Stones, stones with natural holes through them, have always been regarded as protection against witches. In some places there are still cottages which put a number of holed flints on their window-sills. Wherever you find them you know that witchcraft—and the fear of it—has flourished.

stories of nude frolicking and sexual orgies are just a lot of nonsense. At least, they are nonsense if you are talking about *real* witchcraft. The trouble is that lots of cranks who just want to hold wild orgies try to justify it by pretending they are practising witchcraft.

"Yet witchcraft is a very real religion to those who sincerely believe in it. It is a religion with strong moral standards to live up to—a way of life in which parents can bring up children. Witches attend their meetings as other people go to church."

Patricia Crowther was converted to witchcraft in 1956 and joined the Sheffield coven—a coven being made up of thirteen members (twelve witches of both sexes and a leader). The coven now meets at her home.

"There we worship the Horned God and the Moon Goddess Diana," she said. "We believe they need our help as much as we need theirs, because it is not a selfish religion. We believe in reincarnation. We believe we must practise only good magic and not harm anyone.

"Our rites are old and secret. We do not speak of them because to speak of our secret is to lose it. But I will tell you a little. Before a meeting everybody takes a bath. It's a sort of symbolic purification. Then I draw a circle nine feet in diameter using my witch's knife or *Athame* as it is called. After that I consecrate the water, sprinkle the circle and then perfume it with incense. I step into the circle and welcome the members in one by one. When we are all gathered within it I perform the rites. The gods are called up and in winter there's a cauldron of fire.

"We always dance because we believe that there's a magic power in our bodies which can be released by dancing and

we whirl round and round till we are dizzy."

Patricia told me that in the old days one of the dances which was a fertility charm for ensuring good crops was performed by riding astride a pole or broom. The witches leaped high into the air because they wanted the crops to grow high. It was this ritual that gave rise to the superstition that witches "flew" on broomsticks. Many of the old fertility dances have survived to recent times. The dances

6. HILL FIGURES

In parts of the country giant figures are cut out in turf on the hillsides. Examples are the Giant of Cerne at Cerne Abbas, in Dorset, and the Long Man of Wilmington in Sussex. These are some representations of the Horned God.

round the village maypole and the Horn Dance of Abbots Bromley, Staffordshire, are two examples.

The object of one of the witchcraft rites is to raise a cone

Photographed on her hundredth birthday, Doctor Margaret Murray

of power within the circle. Once raised, that power can be used to achieve various magic purposes. In the darkest days of the last war, when France had fallen and Hitler's

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invasion seemed imminent, a great gathering of British witches took place at a secret rendezvous near the south coast. There they raised a gigantic cone of power and used it to direct the thought to the Führer's brain. "You cannot cross the sea. You cannot cross the sea. Not able to come. Not able to come." The witches do not claim that they stopped Hitler. All they point out is that he never even tried to cross the Channel.

Usually the cone of power is directed to less ambitious ends.

Patricia Crowther told me of witches who claim to summon up good weather, who cast spells to obtain such possessions as

7. WITCH BOTTLES

Sometimes when an old cottage or building is destroyed a bottle is found buried under the door or by the hearth. This shows it was once a witch's home. The bottle is a witch bottle. Filled with urine, pins and hair, it was buried by the witch's enemies, who thought it would bring her trouble and pain, and prevent her from casting evil spells.

motor cars. But she talked of such things with a smile.

"The meaning of witchcraft goes deeper," she said. "It is a way of life—for me, certainly.

"I'm not ashamed of anything I do. Witchcraft is a beautiful religion. I used to belong to the Church of England. I respect and appreciate Christianity and I acknowledge all religions, but to me the craft is something timeless, ageless, real and good. We are worshipping the old gods in the old way and from the moment when I was initiated it was as if something wonderful had brushed against my soul."

That is why Patricia Crowther, the housewife, became Thelema, high-priestess of the neo-pagan witch-cult. She has dedicated her life to it. In return she has received, in her own words, "Spiritual satisfaction and many material benefits.

"All sorts of people you'd never expect are witches—secretaries, shop assistants, bus drivers, clerks, teachers, doctors, housewives, even a policeman. Of course you wouldn't know it to look at them. There's no sort of witch mark like the warts and things that the witch hunters used to look for in the old days of the persecution, though Arnold and I both wear special engraved bracelets on our wrists, and I wear a garter on my left thigh. That's because I'm the

high-priestess of our coven."

In the course of my researches I learned of witches' covens in London, Brighton, Norfolk, the Isle of Man, Yorkshire, the Cotswolds, Lancashire and West Country, Essex, Scotland and Ireland.

I met other witches who shared Patricia Crowther's belief that theirs is the ancient religion of joy. They said they were proud to worship Nature and the Life Force with gaiety, dancing and feasting.

Christianity found witchcraft a stubborn rival for many centuries. Kings, queens and rulers might pay lip-service to the new god of the Christians, but for hundreds of years the mass of the people still clung obstinately to the Old Religion of their ancestors. And it was not only the simple, rustic folk who stayed faithful to it.

One night in the year 1348 a noble lady dancing in the arms of King Edward III suddenly stumbled and turned pale. She had dropped her garter. His Majesty bent down, picked it up and, exclaiming "*Honi soit qui mal y pense*" ("Evil be to him who evil thinks"), fastened it to his own leg.

History has seen the gesture as the action of a gallant monarch anxious to spare a

8. HORSESHOES

Because it is shaped like the crescent moon, the horseshoe placated the Moon Goddess of witches. It was thus held to be lucky and to protect any house which displayed it from evil spells.

lady's blushes, but Dr. Margaret Murray had another explanation.

"The possession of that garter showed that the lady was a high-priestess of the Old Religion, and by his act the King placed himself in the position of the leader of the witches. To commemorate the event, he founded the Order of the Garter, with a membership of twenty-six knights."

Today, led by the Queen, it remains one of the highest of all knightly orders in Europe. Strange to think that it may have originated as a double coven (twice 13 is 26) of the most high-born witches in the land.

In olden times the Grand-master or Devil of the coven—the man who, masked and wearing ritual horns on his head, represented the earthly incarnation of the Horned God—was known by many names. This may have been a deliberate stratagem to keep his real identity secret. One of the

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most popular names for this Man-Devil was Robin, and quite often Robin Hood.

Said Dr. Murray, "Dressed in Lincoln green, he was the Green Man of the Woods."

As the Church grew in strength and power, so did the war it waged against the witches grow in ferocity. By the middle of the sixteenth century the witch hunt was on with a vengeance. The last witch to be executed in Britain was a woman called Janet Horne, burned at Dornoch in Sutherlandshire, in June, 1727.

But witchcraft lived on. It lived in the country witches,

9. IN YOUR CHURCH

An unexpected place to find clues to witchcraft, but churches were one of the few places where masons, many of whom belonged to the Old Religion, could find work. Sometimes they would leave a mark of the Old Religion on the sly. Such are many of the so-called mason's marks; gargoyles, too, were often carved like the pagan Horned God.

who practised the so-called white magic. Much of their magic was a compound of herbs, simples and credulity. They

could cure warts, tooth-ache, infertility and even sick cattle. They could supply love philtres, and also provide charms against the evil eye. The measure of their success was the quality of the faith they inspired and it often proved that faith, which is said to be able to move mountains, was able to remove warts.

You will still find white witches in Cheshire and Devon and other rural corners.

It is not only the Patricia

10. WITCH BALLS

One finds them now mostly in antique shops, those spheres of glass, mostly green in colour. They used to be hung inside windows to warn witches. You can still spot the odd one serving its old purpose in out-of-the-way corners of Britain.

Crowthers, the Gerald Gardners and the thousand other professing witches in Britain who keep the cult of the witches alive. Deep in the mind of every one of us there is a small and secret place where all the magic of wishful thinking and make-believe are jealously preserved.

**NEXT MONTH:
The Secrets of Black Magic**