

SCOTS WITCHES STILL CASTING SPELLS

AT least EIGHTY "white" witches are still practising secretly in Scotland. They make charms and work spells to help people in distress.

And the man who says so, grey-haired, bearded Dr. Gerald Gardner, a Scots-born expert on folklore, who now lives on the Isle of Man, admits: "I'm an elder witch myself."

Dr. Gardner plans to come to Scotland later this month to visit "a fellow witch."

But he won't travel by broomstick. He is booking a seat on a plane.

"We like to keep in touch with each other," he told me at his witchcraft museum at Castletown, on the holiday island.

He was relaxing in an armchair near a huge iron cauldron.

Punishment for evil

"Witchcraft is a religion," he said. "We acquire proficiency according to the depth of our faith.

"Ours is a power that we use for good. Punishment falls to any who try to use it for evil."

He added quietly: "I know that at least 80 people still practise the white art in Scotland today.

"I am going to Scotland in a few weeks to meet one of them. He is a business man with an important position."

I challenged him to identify the people who still weave the ancient spells.

"That's impossible," he said. "I am the exception.

"Witches must remain anonymous because of the prejudice that still exists against witchcraft.

Daughter into crow

"I have known cases of people losing their jobs when it became known that they were witches."

How widely is witchcraft practised in Scotland today?

A senior researcher from the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh tried to find out.

His inquiries in isolated districts of Scotland revealed these astonishing facts.

A Shetland islander claimed he had seen an angry mother

'But it's all for GOOD'

turn her daughter into a crow for a short time.

A Kirk member reported he had witnessed a young man being turned into a clump of heather by the girl he had jilted.

Cure for evil eye

An old woman of over 80 in the Western Highlands makes up charmed threads for her neighbours to counteract the evil eye or cure illness.

An American tourist's car broke down when he visited the district. Mechanics couldn't start it.

But the engine roared to life after a charmed thread had been wound around the radiator cap.

Some Scots Islanders carry a piece of charmed paper to ward off toothache.

On it are written words, they claim, Christ said to Peter when he suffered toothache:

"Arise, Peter and be well. Whoever shall carry those words in My Name shall never feel the toothache."

Ploughmen's secret cult

But the episode is not quoted in the Bible and a noted authority on the Bible, the Rev. Dr. William Barclay, told me: "I haven't even heard of it as a legend."

In the North of Scotland many ploughmen belong to a cult called "The Horseman's Word."

After a secret initiation members are given a word or phrase that is claimed to give them complete power to make horses do what they want.

The researcher said: "We should deceive ourselves if we imagined that belief in witchcraft is dead."