

**Towards an Academic Study of British Wicca**

- **An Investigation into its Origins**

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Given the nature of this dissertation and the preceding project, many of the concepts and ideas have not been previously developed in either academic or non-academic accounts, while the few existing secondary sources are too recently published by too few scholars to have been effectively challenged. Therefore I remain indebted to those who have given up their valuable time to discuss aspects of my research and, by conversation, advice or asking questions, or proof-reading, assisted me in its development.

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### **Note on Terminology**

There is much debate amongst practitioners over the usage of the terms Wicca and witch, while scholars have expressed the need for standardization of terminology. In this dissertation, I have generally adhered to the terminology used by the source, including using the alternative spelling of Wica when discussing Gardner's work.

Otherwise, I have not differentiated between the two terms and it may be assumed that, even when using the terms witch or witchcraft, it is usually with reference to Wicca.

### **Note on Reflexivity**

I am a Wiccan High Priestess, in the Alexandrian Tradition, who undertook this dissertation having been taught by my initiators that Gardner invented Wicca. During the course of my research, that viewpoint altered several times in considering the evidence. Its conclusion now reflects my current stance that its origins remain too uncertain to call, but the likelihood is that Gardner was at the forefront in reviving an existing tradition of witchcraft. I continue to be open-minded about this issue.

### **Abstract**

This is a twin investigation into the issues and challenges inherent in an academic study of British Wicca, including its current status, the extant and developing methodologies, and an overview of sources and studies undertaken thus far; and how this specifically applies to an historical study into the origins of British Wicca.

The primary objectives of this study are to identify, collate and evaluate all of the available evidence, including a consideration of the existing arguments and hypotheses, so to ascertain whether such an overview would conclusively illuminate the origins of British Wicca; examining what the nature of this evidence could be in order to satisfy the standards of academia; and providing a second overview into the current state of scholarly research in this field, to clarify what research exists, what studies could be usefully undertaken and what issues need to be addressed. A key conclusion is that more research needs to be undertaken before the origins of Wicca can be determined with any degree of certainty.

Underlying this, the main objective was simply to contribute to the development of academic study into British Wicca. Any scholarly research into this religion may be considered pioneering, regardless of the breadth of knowledge contributed to the field, as so little has been undertaken. Within this dissertation there are elements which are truly new contributions, for example, the identification of Cohn's influence upon Kelly; the emphasis upon criteria and definition as potential minefields in the study of British Wicca; a hypothesis on what the origins of the religion might be; and the succinct chronology of research, attached as an appendix, entitled 'Chronology of the Existing Research'.

## Introduction

Historians have argued that a religion may only be fully understood by studying its origins; otherwise it is akin to researching Christianity armed only with a cross, without knowing the story of the crucifixion of Christ.<sup>1</sup> However, practising Wiccans today disagree on such basic points as whether their religion is an ancient tradition or merely a forty to fifty year old movement founded by Gerald Gardner.

In 1954, Gardner's book, *Witchcraft Today*, told of how he had been initiated into Wica, a witchcraft religion, by a coven in the New Forest. He suggested that Wica represented independent validation of the conclusions reached by Dr Margaret Murray, thirty years previously, that a pre-Christian witch-cult had survived into the 17<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>2</sup> and evidence that this ancient religion had continued, albeit in fragmentary form, into the present day. Fifty years later, the main questions are: did an old religion survive and, if so, did it survive to the present day to be developed into Wicca? Did this old religion fit into the model suggested by Murray and/or Gardner? Or was the religion newly created during the last century and if so, by whom? To what extent did Gardner influence its development? Did he, in fact, invent the religion in its entirety?

Debates amongst practitioners, escalating from these questions, have frequently been acrimonious and divisive, causing influential adherents to appeal for a new emphasis upon the commonalities of the present and the evolution of the religion in the future, rather than focusing on their uncertain origins.<sup>3</sup> If these origins could be established beyond a doubt, then the benefit for Wiccan practitioners is self-evident.

As Wicca is undoubtedly one of the fastest growing Western religions,<sup>4</sup> it might be argued that studying it in any discipline would add to our understanding of the social history of the past fifty years, informing a richer perspective of today's society. Also if it can be proved that Wicca was newly created in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, then it holds a unique place in history as the only purely

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<sup>1</sup> Documentary, F Pryor, 'Britain BC', History Channel, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> M Murray, 'The Witch-cult in Western Europe', p 12

<sup>3</sup> Examples include Doreen Valiente, in a speech to the Pagan Federation Conference, in November 1997, in S Griffyn, 'Wiccan Wisdomkeepers', p 39; and Janet Farrar and Gavin Bone, in their book, 'Progressive Witchcraft', p 44-45

<sup>4</sup> R Buckland, 'From the Inside', p 153

English religion to be presented to the world.<sup>5</sup> Whereas the origins of most mainstream religions are lost in antiquity, there is a real opportunity to document the origins of Wicca, if it is proved to be a new religious movement.

However, academia has been slow to take up the challenge of critical historical research, which might clarify this fundamental issue in order that hypotheses may be made concerning the social context, evolution, theology and psychology of Wicca. Without a plethora of secondary sources to form the basis of on-going research, the reliance must therefore be on primary sources; whilst Wicca's status as an area of pioneering academic study means that basic issues like terminology and definition are still being established. Indeed, while undertaking this research, there were several occasions when a simple, chronological list of the debates and contributions to the pool of knowledge, would have been helpful in contextualizing sources. As this was not available, it has been created and added as an appendix. Similarly, often a line of enquiry faltered as the focused research which could have informed it did not exist. It would have been outside the scope of this dissertation to have undertaken it, so these too have been listed and added as an appendix.

The first section of this dissertation focuses upon the issues and problems in studying Wicca academically. While the question of its origins is used as a touchstone, these are challenges inherent to any study of Wicca. The second section interrogates the debates concerning the origins of Wicca, in order to assess their success in identifying them. For thematic ease, these have been placed into three categories: 'survival', which argues that Wicca has been practised as a continuing religion since, possibly, pre-Christian times; 'revival', which argues that Wicca is the relatively modern reconstruction of an Old Religion; and 'invention', which argues that Wicca was invented during the twentieth-century, as an entirely new religion. Both the first and second sections should inform the conclusion of this dissertation. This is in the form of a hypothesis which argues that Gardner, having received no formal training as an academic, may have lacked the research skills necessary for an impartial study of the New Forest coven. As he was the sole source of information about this coven and their religious practices, Wicca has developed subsequently from his Murrayite interpretation of the evidence, obscuring what clues to its origins the evidence might, or might not, have otherwise revealed.

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<sup>5</sup> R Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon*, p vii

## **Issues and Problems in Studying Wicca**

**Challenges for the Scholar**

**An Overview of Sources**

**Defining the Search**

### Challenges for the Scholars

The academic study of British Wicca remains in its infancy, despite the plethora of non-academic literature and other sources publicly available, thus its historians have, by default, the air of the pioneer about them. Such basic questions as terminology, methodology and chronology have to be addressed before progressing towards an analysis of the history. Currently, these are still being developed or remain outstanding. Secondary sources are few and are so recently published that their ideas and conclusions, as yet, remain largely unchallenged and result in an over-reliance on the works and conclusions of specific scholars. Researchers venturing into this field rapidly gain the impression that their most important task is to metaphorically roll up their sleeves in order to assist in the building of foundations.

In hindsight, Prof Ronald Hutton's view of his *Triumph of the Moon* (1999) was that it 'automatically turned me into a pioneer, undertaking the history of a subject which had never been attempted in depth before, at least by an academic scholar.'<sup>6</sup> Two years later, Dr Jo Pearson bemoaned the fact that while 'a number of necessary general and sweeping studies (have been) produced over the past five years... specific studies are still lacking. Such specific studies may be regarded as constituting the 'second wave' of scholarship concerning Wicca and Paganism...'<sup>7</sup> Philip Heselton's *Gerald Gardner and the Cauldron of Inspiration* (2003), which analysed the known influences upon Gardner to assess whether he could have created a composite of Wicca from them, was written because 'there is nothing similar available. Indeed, there is much genuinely new material which is being published for the first time.'<sup>8</sup>

This dissertation seeks to develop the work already undertaken in *Approaches to the Study of Wicca*<sup>9</sup>, which explored the ways in which scholars might study Wicca. Since submission, this project might be seen to be updated by reference to Prof Ronald Hutton, who devoted a chapter of his book, *Witches, Druids and King Arthur* (2004), to the challenges inherent to an historian in this developing academic field. He identified three main problematic areas, which may be summarized as follows:

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<sup>6</sup> R Hutton, 'Witches, Druids and King Arthur', p 260

<sup>7</sup> J Pearson, 'Demarcating the Field: Paganism, Wicca and Witchcraft', Diskus Vol 6, p 12

<sup>8</sup> P Heselton, 'Gerald Gardner and the Cauldron of Inspiration', p 423

<sup>9</sup> J Harrington, 'Approaches to the Study of Wicca', MA Project, University of Wolverhampton

1. The scarcity of professional academics undertaking studies of Pagan religions means that they, by default, become the experts to whom authorities in wider society (i.e. prison wardens, school boards, police officers etc) are referred. This role discourages reflexivity on the part of the historian in order to safeguard this position, while a lack of reflexivity may be considered detrimental to a critical analysis of the research.<sup>10</sup>
  
2. The caution of the Pagan world leads to inherent difficulties in constructing the history of a mystery religion when a) a majority of the records are in the private keeping of custodians committed by oath to secrecy; b) access to these records requires gaining the trust of these custodians; which requires c) bridging the twenty year old divergence of opinion, regarding the origins of Pagan witchcraft, between some adherents of the religion and academia; and d) overcoming and repairing the legacy of distrust regarding academics by the Pagan community, which was a result of the methodology of Tanya Luhrmann in the 1980s.<sup>11</sup> Luhrmann had been welcomed into many Pagan covens, circles or lodges and had become a trusted confidante of practitioners within them. She spent over a year participating in these groups just as any other member, in order to gain a subjective understanding of their practices. Though she had explained her position as an anthropologist undertaking doctoral research, Luhrmann did acknowledge that, as the months progressed, many viewed her as a fellow practitioner,

‘I was honest about my enterprise, but my intention was to fit in, to dispel outsider status, and was rather relieved when people forgot what I had so carefully told them.’<sup>12</sup>

As a result, many practitioners were alarmed and felt somewhat betrayed when her research was published, firstly as *Scions of Prospero: Ritual Magic and Witchcraft in Present Day England*, a doctoral thesis for the University of Cambridge (1986), then more widely as *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft* (1991). Hutton described ‘the (common) enduring impression of her (amongst practitioners) as an academic outsider who had been welcomed and taken into

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<sup>10</sup> R Hutton, ‘Witches, Druids and King Arthur’, p 259

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p 260-264

<sup>12</sup> T Luhrmann, ‘*Persuasions of the Witch's Craft*’, p 17

confidence, only to use those who had trusted her as a means to further her professional career, and discard and deride them when their utility was ended.’<sup>13</sup>

3. The standard modes of behaviour within the academic world lead to inherent difficulties in constructing a history of a mystery religion as a) extant academic methodology discourages ‘going native’, yet the rapidly evolving methodology, as developed by the few scholars in the field to counter the challenges outlined in point two, require a respect for the beliefs encountered, which can seem like ‘going native’;<sup>14</sup> and b) the isolation engendered by the relative lack of ‘experts’ in the field can be discouraging, does not lend itself to cross-fertilization of ideas and leads to insecurity concerning professional career paths.<sup>15</sup>

The project did explore most of these points independently, with many of the same conclusions. The one point of diversion came with the favoured approach, which had been Phenomenology – the ‘participant-observer’ methodology, developed within the Religious Studies discipline. This method seeks to create a ‘bridge of understanding’ between the researcher, who participates in most aspects of the particular religious practice but endeavours to retain objectivity, and the subjective believers.<sup>16</sup>

Supported by the experiences of seven contemporary scholars researching Paganism, Hutton took the view that it is impossible to retain absolute objectivity, because the reflexivity of the researcher will impact upon both the research itself and its conclusions. He argued that an historian is freed, somewhat, from the problematic area of reflexivity, in that a history does not have to recommend any religion as a viable practice and belief for today’s society, in the same way that other disciplines, such as anthropology and sociology, may implicitly be required to do by portraying its contemporary nature. But reflexivity is still a factor. Hutton argued that the ‘insider’ perspective may yet yield the greatest academic results, as it acknowledges the impossibility of objectivity in studying religions. Acceptance of this fact frees researchers to declare their own religious affiliations and the ‘insider’ is in unique position to access sources or gain insights which may be out of reach for the ‘outsider’. An interdisciplinary application of ‘compassionate anthropology’ – the cognitive sharing of the

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<sup>13</sup> R Hutton, *Witches, Druids and King Arthur*, p 261

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p 269

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p 273

<sup>16</sup> G Chyrssides interview February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2004.

experiences of the group under study, insofar as it is possible – was his preferred second choice approach.<sup>17</sup>

Phenomenology was originally chosen as the existing methodological model most likely to satisfy the requirements of academia, while also facilitating the co-operative support of the Pagan community. If the restriction against impartiality can justifiably be removed, then both the ‘insider’ model and an application of ‘compassionate anthropology’ would naturally be preferable approaches. In the project preceding this dissertation, many challenges to objectivity were discussed with the conclusion being that true objectivity would be extremely difficult for the scholar. The ideal might be seen as an ‘insider’ with the capacity to research one’s own religion with an open-mind, academic integrity and an ability to accept whatever the evidence is able to prove, whilst not selecting sources simply to fit pre-conceived hypotheses.<sup>18</sup> These are attributes which should apply to any academic, regardless of religious nor non-religious affiliations.

It may also be argued that the nature of Wicca already fosters these attributes within its clergy. Wicca is a mystery religion, eternally reinventing itself according to the beliefs and practice of each individual practitioner. There is very little dogma and what does exist may be superseded by the right of individual Wiccans to follow a spiritual path most suited to their particular and specific needs. For example, the creed, ‘Do as you will an it harm none’, could be so widely interpreted to provide simultaneous religious justification for both vegetarianism and omnivorism; any political affiliation; support for some wars (specifically those intervening in cases of genocide or human rights abuses) and support for anti-war perspectives. Whilst most covens do converge upon the dogma laid down by its High Priestess and High Priest, the religion itself does strongly facilitate diversity, as will be discussed more fully in the chapter, ‘Defining the Search’. In the present context, it should be noted that there appears to be no general dogma in modern Wicca which dictates a specific perspective on its history.

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<sup>17</sup> R Hutton, *Witches, Druids and King Arthur*, pp 288-291

<sup>18</sup> Though this could justifiably be viewed as my personal reflexivity, as a Wiccan High Priestess undertaking exactly this kind of research.

### An Overview of Sources

The foremost primary sources for determining whether Gerald Gardner created a new religion, or publicized an existing one, must be his own works. In the public arena, these constitute two fictional accounts of witchcraft, written before decriminalization, *A Goddess Arrives* (1940) and *High Magic's Aid* (1949); two factual accounts of witchcraft, written post-decriminalization, *Witchcraft Today* (1954) and *The Meaning of Witchcraft* (1959); and a biography, *Gerald Gardner: Witch* (1960), which, though authored by JL Bracelin, relied upon Gardner as the sole source and was proof-read by its subject before publication, therefore it must be considered as having the status of an autobiography.

Supplementing these are the accounts provided by his contemporary Wiccans and people simultaneously claiming the perpetuation of their own on-going traditions of witchcraft independently of Gerald Gardner. In the first category, there should be especial reference to Doreen Valiente's testimonies, as she was among Gardner's first High Priestesses, and therefore able to clarify which aspects of Gardnerian Wicca were created by herself and Gerald Gardner; while Patricia Crowther and Fred Lamond both knew him, were initiated into his coven and have both written publicly available books.

Aidan Kelly based the bulk of his research on papers belonging to Gardner. These included letters, and notes or draft versions of both Gardner's *Book of Shadows* and his *Craft Laws*, neither of which have been published. There is one query about the former though, as Kelly wrote, '... it seemed very odd that there were no mentions of the Craft<sup>19</sup> except in one file of correspondence, dating from 1957 to 1962, which seemed to be complete.'<sup>20</sup> This may be explained by an incident recounted by Doreen Valiente telling how, during a period of extremely adverse newspaper coverage in the mid-1950s, witches became nervous about a judicial modern day 'witch-hunt', with paranoia rife concerning telephone-tapping and the interception of letters. She advised Gardner to destroy any paperwork which would identify practising witches.

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<sup>19</sup> The Craft is another name for Wicca and/or witchcraft.

<sup>20</sup> A Kelly, '*Crafting the Art of Magic: Book 1: A History of Modern Witchcraft 1939-1964*', p xviii

‘He returned to his London flat and had a big clear-out there also. The main object was to prevent any general round-up of witches, if the police decided to act upon the newspaper’s clamour. They might question Gerald, Donna (Gardner’s wife) and possibly myself; but if they couldn’t find any names and addresses or any proof against anyone and if none of us would talk, there wouldn’t be much they could do.’<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, Patricia’s Crowther’s memoirs described her seeing a ballroom floor strewn with a ‘large mound of Gardner’s letters and papers’ and told how his friend, Angus McCleod, had ‘made a huge bonfire on the beach and, apart from certain items, burned the lot.’<sup>22</sup> A decade spans between these two incidents, with the latter taking place shortly after Gardner’s death, but both would account for the limited survival of primary sources from the important Gardnerian period which could have informed the historian.

Secondary sources relate to research already conducted into the claims of Gardner, Valiente, Cochrane and Sanders. There has been a tendency to include Wicca within a wider study of Paganism or witchcraft, at least, if not a longitudinal work encompassing anything under in the vague category of ‘occult’ or ‘new religious movement’. This is certainly the case with Colin Wilson’s *The Occult*, Jeffrey Russell’s *The History of Witchcraft*, all of Ronald Hutton’s books, Ankaloo and Clark’s *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Twentieth Century*, amongst others. There are very few scholarly works that focus solely upon Wicca; Aidan Kelly’s *Crafting the Art of Magic* and Philip Heselton’s *Wiccan Roots* and *Gerald Gardner and the Cauldron of Inspiration* are rare exceptions.

Whilst this multi-faith perspective does provide the advantage of contextualizing Wicca within historical, religious and sociological trends, it does muddy the waters somewhat as to which sources should be considered integral contributors to the study of Wicca alone. It does, however, reflect the organizational trend within British Wicca, for example, the Pagan Federation, once led by and serving only Wiccans, now welcomes and represents adherents of all Pagan religions.

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<sup>21</sup> D Valiente, ‘*The Rebirth of Witchcraft*’, p 67

<sup>22</sup> P Crowther, ‘*High Priestess: The Life & Times of Patricia Crowther*’, p 118

### **Defining the Search**

The focus in the search for the origins of Wicca generally starts with Gerald Gardner, as the religion has not been located in its entirety, or anything bearing the name of Wicca, in the pre-Gardnerian past. There could be a variety of reasons to account for this, not least that which Gardner proffered in the very sentence which informed his readership that Wicca had survived, '(I) took the usual oaths of secrecy which bound me not to reveal any secrets of the cult. But... it is a dying cult...'<sup>23</sup> Conversely, Aidan Kelly and others have suggested that Gardner fabricated evidence in order to disguise the fact that he was founding a new religion, instead of, as he claimed, making an anthropological discovery in uncovering contemporary witches practicing an old religion. If this position has merit, then Wicca will not be found in the preceding centuries, because it did not exist. Neither option leaves much scope for a paper trail throughout history, which, in turn, greatly reduces the amount of evidence available for interrogation by the historian. It also ensures that the nature of pre-1950s Wicca is defined by its Gardnerian presentation. As a result, it could be stated with some confidence that Gardner's key assertion that 'the witches do not know the origin of their cult'<sup>24</sup> is as true in 2004 as it was in 1954.

As will be discussed in the next part of this dissertation, Gardner claimed that Wicca was the modern manifestation of a pre-Christian Pagan religion, which had survived throughout the Christian era and was comparable to a witch-cult model proposed by Dr Margaret Murray. Many early Wiccan writers talked about the Old Religion as if it were stated fact that their religion did indeed have a traceable history stretching into antiquity. This again is another area in dire need of definition: what was the Old Religion and how is modern Wicca comparable to it? In 1989, Doreen Valiente wrote that the origins of witchcraft 'must lie in the ancient shamanism which predates all the sophisticated techniques of the medieval sorcerer', but still had a claim to being a religion as 'religion and magic were two sides of the same coin'.<sup>25</sup> Eleven years later, historian Ann Moura agreed with this view,

'Witchcraft, the Craft, the Old Religion, Wicca, and Neo-Paganism... (have) roots (which) are sunk deep in the shamanistic and naturalistic expressions of universal interconnection found in

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<sup>23</sup> G Gardner, '*Witchcraft Today*', p 19

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p 48

<sup>25</sup> D Valiente, '*The Rebirth of Witchcraft*', p 65

the earliest known spiritual traditions of humankind. Over time, the Craft evolved to reflect, and deflect, changes in society, economy, politics, and the new religions that supported these innovations. Through all these alterations, the Old Religion never lost its deeper awareness of the interrelationship of all life on Earth and our place among the stars.<sup>26</sup>

Glass's history, drawing upon common Wiccan perspectives in the early 1960s, described the Old Religion in both shamanistic terms and goddess worship,<sup>27</sup> while linking witchcraft back to the Mystery Traditions of ancient Egypt, Greece and the 'Mediterranean parts of the Roman Empire.'<sup>28</sup> This, therefore, is the Old Religion, which historians may investigate in order to determine whether Wicca is indeed its modern manifestation or a separate entity entirely.

The historian apparently has two avenues of investigation: to interrogate the Gardnerian period in order to prove that he, with others or alone, founded the religion; and to scour the past for any trace of Wicca, in order to either prove that Gardner changed it, revived it or was basically truthful in his assertions. A survey of the extant literature, however, shows that even whilst opting for one of these focused approaches – thus revealing pre-existing bias in what general conclusions they expect to reach – each researcher has basically been searching for a different goal. There appears to be no consensus about what is the core of Wicca or central to its beliefs and practices, insofar that if x, y and/or z are uncovered, then the presence of Wicca has been proved to exist in that time and place; there is no formula for which academics are agreed that its application would result in proving or discounting Wicca's traces within each area, period, society or personal theology under investigation.

Without such a standardized litmus test, the criteria have been set by each individual researcher for what should be found, and how the evidence should be interpreted, in order to identify the existence of Wicca, which has obvious implications for its conclusion. By creating their own benchmark against which the success or failure of their hypothesis may be measured, the researcher predetermines the conclusions generated by this research. This may be illustrated by the two examples of Heselton and Kelly, as they investigated the same time period from opposing premises, and correspondingly reached

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<sup>26</sup> A Moura, *The Evolution of a World Religion: Origins of Modern Witchcraft*, p 1

<sup>27</sup> J Glass, *Witchcraft: The Sixth Sense*, pp 22-34

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p 92

opposing conclusions. Both writers' perspectives will be explored more fully in the second section of this dissertation, as the focus here is purely upon their criteria for recognizing Wicca.

Heselton approached his research from the perspective that Gardner had revived witchcraft, which he describes as more accurately a craft than a religion, based upon a surviving tradition.<sup>29</sup> From this angle, he presupposes that Gardner's account is basically true. Therefore the benchmarks, against which Heselton's research interrogates the origins of Wicca, derive from Gardner himself and unself-consciously may include anything of a Pagan, occult or metaphysical nature.

Heselton is careful to differentiate between fact and speculation. He also amassed an impressive portfolio of circumstantial evidence that does support Gardner's claim to have been initiated in the New Forest, such as an analysis of the diaries of Dorothy Clutterbuck, whom Gardner named as his initiator, which demonstrate a Pagan outlook on life in general.<sup>30</sup> However, there remains an inherent circular state of validation underpinning his conclusion that 'Gardner did not invent the whole thing.'<sup>31</sup> The evidence is being investigated because Gardner pointed to it and he is deemed to be generally a reliable source; this evidence supports Gardner's claims, therefore proving that he is a reliable source; as he is a reliable source, his evidence may be considered to provide signposts to the origins of Wicca, and so on.

An alternative, though not necessarily valid, interpretation may be analogous to a Victorian magician's sleight of hand. Gardner deliberately moved into the area, where he knew that members of certain organizations, such as the Theosophical Society, the Rosicrucians and the Co-Masons, resided and which had an established history of Pagan activity, as documented by Margaret Murray<sup>32</sup>. He then needed only to direct researchers back to the New Forest, ensuring that he was the sole point of contact between the witches and the public, whilst explaining the vagueness of his potentially verifiable information with reference to his Wiccan oath of secrecy and the desire for anonymity on the part of his initiators.<sup>33</sup> It was inevitable, following this model, that a researcher would discover the right sort of

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<sup>29</sup> P Heselton, *Wiccan Roots: Gerald Gardner and the Modern Witchcraft Revival*, pp 4-5

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p 199-201

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p 304

<sup>32</sup> M Murray, *The God of the Witches*, pp 167-171

<sup>33</sup> G Gardner, *The Meaning of Witchcraft*, p 40

contacts placed in such a context that Gardner would seem validated and his claims about Wicca would appear feasible.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Kelly's focus was upon the ritual work of Gerald Gardner, which he suspected was fundamentally misleading on the subject of its origins. The premise was that, despite Wicca's pretension to secrecy, Kelly and his friends had been able to successfully reconstruct Gardnerian rituals, from information provided in various published works in the 1960s, therefore could Gardner have not done the same thing in reconstructing a witch-cult based on the works of Margaret Murray and others?<sup>34</sup> His barometer was that, if the varying versions of the *Book of Shadows* could be proved to have traceable sources, which could have been accessed by Gardner, then this could be interpreted as proof that Gardner was the founding father of Wicca.<sup>35</sup> Kelly's implicit argument being that if Wicca had existed for centuries, then it would already have its own fully-formed rites and literature, so would not have to borrow from external occult sources.

Kelly proceeded to locate the source of each line within each version and was able to triumphantly conclude that Gardner did not receive the religious rites and practices, even in a fragmentary form, from a surviving circle of witches, as 'it merely complicates life to suppose that Gardner' did anything other than compile, write or commission each *Book of Shadows* himself.<sup>36</sup> He also used the obvious fact of Gardner's regular re-writing of the content as evidence that it was not an ancient source, on the basis that only a book's author would feel comfortable doing this.<sup>37</sup>

However, this framework assumes that a *Book of Shadows* is, to the witches, a collection of prescribed text, which must remain static and undoctored, frozen in the form presented by the initiator, despite Kelly's assertion to the contrary elsewhere in his book.<sup>38</sup> This is not the nature of the book, which is best described as a journal or notebook. Patricia Crowther's description is typical,

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<sup>34</sup> A Kelly, 'Crafting the Art of Magic: Book 1: A History of Modern Witchcraft 1939-1964', p xii

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p xix

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p 176

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p 45

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p xiii

‘An important item is your book of words. You will collect more and more rituals, spells, poetry and invocations as you progress. Start with a large exercise book in which to incorporate your writings. This is called the Book of Shadows.’<sup>39</sup>

All that Kelly in fact proved was that Gardner recorded his subjective ritual techniques, spiritual journeying and personal theology in a series of ever-amended volumes, as is demonstrably a common practice for post-Gardnerian Wiccans and has not been shown to not exist amongst pre-Gardnerian Wiccans. Whilst this creates a valuable secondary source, charting the influences upon Gardner and Wicca during a crucial period of its growth, it does not categorically prove that Gardner founded the religion itself. It arguably provides circumstantial evidence pointing towards this conclusion, but fails to prove that these were the first ever such books in British magical or religious history.

In fact the research of Dr Owen Davies has uncovered books and manuscripts, between the 13<sup>th</sup>-century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which are comparable to the *Book of Shadows*, though neither that title nor Wicca appear to be mentioned in the sources surrounding them. The similarities are evident:

1. *The security and concealment of the books.* Davies quotes a 13<sup>th</sup> century collector as saying ‘a secure place ought to be set aside for them, which no one can enter save their proper owner.’<sup>40</sup> Gardner’s reproduced *Warning* from his book states, ‘each should guard his own writings and destroy them whenever danger threatens.’<sup>41</sup>
2. *The destruction of these books upon their owner’s incarceration or death.* Hutton told how the neighbours of a reputed Sussex witch, in 1920, insisted on the burning of her magical books as soon as she was removed to the workhouse.<sup>42</sup> Valiente advised that ‘an old rule of the covens... is that when anyone died his book was to be burned.’<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> P Crowther, ‘*Lid Off The Cauldron*’, p 49

<sup>40</sup> O Davies, ‘*Cunning-Folk: Popular Magic in English History*’, p 119

<sup>41</sup> G Gardner, ‘*Witchcraft Today*’, p 57

<sup>42</sup> R Hutton, ‘*The Triumph of the Moon*’, p 91

<sup>43</sup> D Valiente, ‘*An ABC of Witchcraft*’, p 46

3. *The incorporation of specific texts or influences.* Kelly identified five main sources for the rituals in Gardner's *Book of Shadows*.<sup>44</sup> Only one, *the Key of Solomon*, was published within the timeframe of Davies's research, but had been available across Europe since the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>45</sup> Also Hutton discovered an account of it having been used in Somerset at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>46</sup> However, there are two different works entitled *The Key of Solomon*,<sup>47</sup> it is uncertain to which Kelly refers.
  
4. *The use of these books not simply as texts, but subject to additions or amendments by their owners, plus evidence of books having been copied from older versions.* Davies tells of a 16<sup>th</sup> century grimoire, hand-written, which 'contains a similar range of material as that presented by (another grimoire)', while a separate manuscript, copied from elsewhere, 'was subsequently owned and tinkered with in the following century'.<sup>48</sup> From the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there is an account of tinkers owning magical books, which a gentleman named Adam Clarke borrowed in order to 'make copious notes'.<sup>49</sup> Hutton reported that a book, surviving into the 1950s, had 'contained data from books issued in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' and had had at least two owners.<sup>50</sup> Vivienne Crowley explained that a Wiccan *Book of Shadows* develops in order to meet the needs of its users, after it has been copied, by hand, from that belonging to the initiator.<sup>51</sup>

It should be obvious by now that, if Kelly's criteria for the historical presence of Wicca is to be accepted, then alternative interpretations of his evidence might also present themselves. For example, Gardner, or his initiator, may have acquired one of these magical books, or else Wicca possibly evolved from the ranks of the apparently solitary practitioners that Davies collectively named the 'Cunning Folk'.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Heselton has since argued, with supporting evidence, that there had been at

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<sup>44</sup> A Kelly, 'Crafting the Art of Magic: Book 1: A History of Modern Witchcraft 1939-1964', p xvi

<sup>45</sup> O Davies, 'Cunning-Folk: Popular Magic in English History', p 120

<sup>46</sup> R Hutton, 'The Triumph of the Moon', p 91

<sup>47</sup> Discussion with Mr Laurence Harris, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2004

<sup>48</sup> O Davies, 'Cunning-Folk: Popular Magic in English History', p 126

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p 128

<sup>50</sup> R Hutton, 'The Triumph of the Moon', p 92

<sup>51</sup> V Crowley, 'Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Age', p 14

<sup>52</sup> O Davies, 'Cunning-Folk: Popular Magic in English History', p vii-viii

least one earlier book pre-dating and used as reference by Gardner, though the later *Book of Shadows* appear to have been written on a 'cut and paste' basis by Gardner and Valiente.<sup>53</sup>

The examples of Heselton and Kelly have been given to show how diverse the criteria for locating Wicca historically can be. While their research is extremely valuable in piecing together, as in a jigsaw puzzle, a picture of what its origins may be, without a definitive definition of Wicca it is difficult to assess their criteria and therefore their conclusions.

An agreed definition of Wicca is vital from the methodological perspective of its scholars as, if it cannot be clearly identified in its current form, how then can it be adequately located in a past where secrecy and illegality are additional factors in its obscurity? Unfortunately Wicca is not easily pinned down, as even the terminology applied can be subjective and therefore misleading. Dr Jo Pearson commented, in her article *Demarcating the Field: Paganism, Wicca and Witchcraft*, that,

‘Despite their commonalities, Wicca, Paganism and witchcraft are not synonymous. However, the common approach among scholars has been to treat these different entities as if they were one and the same.’<sup>54</sup>

There are obvious complications regarding the selection of sources, communication between researchers and those being studied, and the interrogation of the resulting data, unless a consensus can be reached about terminology. Even then, it should be recognized that terminology is not only just as confused, but has also been subject to debate and shifting trends throughout the known history of Wicca. A scholarly agreement now would not retrospectively alter the definition of terms already committed to print, nor is it likely to convince every current or future practitioner to comply, but it would help clarify the academic overview. At the least, it would be helpful if scholars indicated their own usage of various terms within the introductions to their work, which would allow it then to be scrutinized without confusion or deselected as a source if outside the field of study.

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<sup>53</sup> P Heselton, ‘*Gerald Gardner and the Cauldron of Inspiration*’, pp 290-311

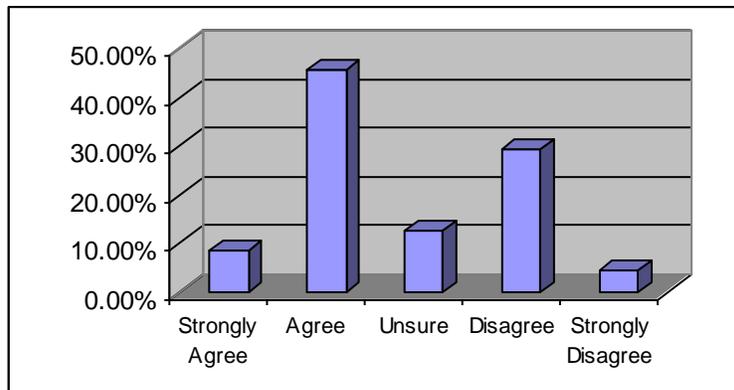
<sup>54</sup> J Pearson, ‘*Demarcating the Field: Paganism, Wicca and Witchcraft*’, p 1

Janet Farrar and Gavin Bone, as practitioners, acknowledged that to define Wicca (which they viewed as interchangeable with the term ‘witchcraft’<sup>55</sup>) was so ‘controversial’ that ‘few people would dare to do so’,<sup>56</sup> but nonetheless they provided one,

‘An evolving, magical, nature-based Priesthood with service to its community as its main role. A witch is also therefore a craftsperson with attained magical skills, with an emphasis on religious and spiritual practice.’<sup>57</sup>

It has only been a matter of months since its publication, but the authors have not received any negative feedback directly, though they have read a review, written by a non-practitioner, which considered it to be too broad.<sup>58</sup>

Farrar and Bone’s definition of Wicca/witchcraft was submitted for comment to the 230 Pagan members of the e-group, Witchgrove,<sup>59</sup> whose owner also allowed a poll to be held on the subject for this dissertation. The group voted upon whether this constituted an acceptable, all-encompassing definition of witchcraft, with the options: Strongly Agree, Agree, Don’t Know/Unsure, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree. The group voted anonymously and were not asked for the reasoning in forming their position.<sup>60</sup>



<sup>55</sup> J Farrar and G Bone, ‘*Progressive Witchcraft*’, p 44

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p 54

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p 55

<sup>58</sup> G Bone, in private e-mail correspondence, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2004

<sup>59</sup> <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/witchgrove/>

<sup>60</sup> Poll conducted over the weekend of 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> December 2004, with thanks to Witchgrove.

In July 2004, Witchgrove conducted a census of its members, which revealed that 90% of them identified themselves as either Wiccan or witch.<sup>61</sup> There is little reason to believe that the denominational structure of the group has altered significantly in the intervening period; therefore the views expressed in the chart above may be said to reflect those of practitioners with a working understanding of contemporary witchcraft. Though the sample group was too small to be considered truly representative, it could be argued that the results, which were also reflected in the ensuing e-mailed discussions on the forum itself, were both predictable and indicative of the difficulties in describing a Mystery Religion.

The majority of responses expressed varying levels of discomfiture at the impossibility of defining a religion that is felt and practised very subjectively. The Mysteries are at the core of the religion and thus define it, but these are abstract articles of faith, which manifest differently in each person, thus rendering the scope of experience too broad to be adequately quantified or assessed. There is very little dogma in Wicca, and what exists is superseded by the inherent philosophy that the Mysteries are better accessed by that which, instinctively or otherwise, works for each individual practitioner and/or coven, even if this is attained by non-traditional methods. Additionally, Saoirse, a member of the group, raised a theological concern, that the question was not *could* but *should* the Mysteries be defined by academia. Her rationale was in keeping with the perception that something labelled and therefore categorized immediately 'restricted' it. The concept of the Mysteries worked only as long as they remained subjective; a standardized academic definition, accepted by practitioners and scholars alike, would have the effect of eroding the core and therefore detrimentally altering the nature of the religion under scrutiny.<sup>62</sup>

The quandary for a scholar of witchcraft lies in a conundrum. Before conclusions reached in a study of Wicca can be accepted, there needs to be agreement that the practice being researched was indeed Wicca. Standard criteria, based on the identifiable components of the religion, need to be applied by all scholars, in order to ensure that each is researching the same thing and therefore the studies would be not only comparable, but constitute pieces within the same over-riding matrix of understanding. Practitioners, who already have this deep understanding of their religion, cannot successfully define it

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<sup>61</sup> Figures provided by Shonna Rhein Gariepy, owner of Witchgrove, in private communication on December 12<sup>th</sup> 2004.

<sup>62</sup> Saoirse, a member of Witchgrove, in private e-mail correspondence, December 12<sup>th</sup> 2004.

to the acceptance of all. The nature of the Craft has, at its core, something indescribable in its subjectivity and its constant state of evolution; in addition to the challenge involved in defining it, there is also the spiritual and ethical question of whether it should be defined.

This is not a modern conundrum. In 1964, Justine Glass interviewed several Wiccans, and Traditional Witches<sup>63</sup> before reaching the conclusion that,

‘The Old Religion is so unco-ordinated at present that no one coven could truly be said to be representative of the Craft tradition as a whole... Witchcraft has survived through millennia because its philosophy was fluid, because it was able to adapt itself to changing conditions, and to make some cardinal contribution to life in varying contexts.’<sup>64</sup>

Ten years previously, Gardner had written that, because of the absence of their theological literature ‘it is difficult for me to discover all (the witches) actually believe’,<sup>65</sup> however, he later contradicted himself by stating that ‘the faith of the cult is summed up in a witch’s book I possess,’<sup>66</sup> though if this is a *Book of Shadows*, it could only be used as evidence of that witch and/or the coven’s articles of faith. His summary of their faith was that the gods were not all-powerful, but relied on human assistance; dances and rites were based on the preset of ‘sympathetic magic, the idea that like attracts like’; and that their deities preferred happiness over anger.<sup>67</sup> Based on the beliefs outlined in this single book, and having already noted elsewhere that ‘each coven is independent,’<sup>68</sup> this was the closest Gardner came to defining Wicca in *Witchcraft Today*.

It is difficult to reach a conclusion on this issue. One solution might be that academics accept a definition, like that provided by Farrar and Bone on the understanding that it will not be recognized as such by the majority of practitioners; but this has obvious methodological implications. A less satisfactory response would be the recognition that there is no standard criterion that can be used to

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<sup>63</sup> Traditional Witchcraft is a distinct Pagan religion of which the most notable adherent was Robert Cochrane.

<sup>64</sup> J Glass, ‘*Witchcraft: The Sixth Sense*’, p 133

<sup>65</sup> G Gardner, ‘*Witchcraft Today*’, p 44

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, p 145

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, p 145

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, p 133

define the subject, thus the scholar continues to study witchcraft and Wicca as its adherents practise it – subjectively.

**A Summary of the Debates in Wicca and Academia Concerning Wiccan Origins**

**An Overview of the Debates**

**The Survival Perspective**

**The Revival Perspective**

**The Invention Perspective**

### An Overview of the Debates

‘Just how ancient the tradition was is a subject of much debate,’<sup>69</sup> wrote Vivianne Crowley, succinctly summarizing two decades of acrimony, recriminations, sidestepped or simply ignored issues, rewritten histories or defence of the existing history. Ronald Hutton identified five possible perspectives surrounding these, which have been quoted here in full:

1. Gardner was initiated into a surviving coven of the Old Religion of western Europe, which had been driven underground under the name of witchcraft by the persecutions of the early modern period.
2. Gardner was initiated into a group practising another sort of pagan religion, which had survived in secret since antiquity.
3. Gardner was initiated into a group practising a modern pagan religion which had been developed in the early twentieth century or, at furthest remove and with much less plausibility, in the nineteenth.
4. Wicca was created by a group of people in the 1940s, among whom Gardner was a key figure, perhaps the leading personality and certainly the only one who wanted to perpetuate the religion by revealing it to the public.
5. Gardner created Wicca himself, composing all its early rites.<sup>70</sup>

While these categories sum up brilliantly the possible scenarios, many writers could easily be placed in more than one category, simply because the evidence is not currently sufficient for them to come to a definitive conclusion. Also some writers, for example, Margaret Murray and Pennethorne Hughes, have been retrospectively assigned a category, with which neither of them would have agreed, in the following analysis of the debates into the origins of Wicca. It is simpler, for the sake of analysis, to

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<sup>69</sup> V Crowley, ‘*Way of Wicca*’, p 13.

<sup>70</sup> R Hutton, ‘*Witches, Druids and King Arthur*’ p 282

interrogate the evidence within three broader categories: a) Survival, that Wicca represents the unbroken continuation of an old religion; b) Revival: a reconstruction, based on research and/or surviving fragments, of an old religion; or c) Invention, created from scratch as a twentieth-century new religious movement. However, it is acknowledged that these categories may overlap somewhat, for example, a newly invented religion may draw upon ideas or materials from history, while surviving religions may evolve their practices and beliefs to such an extent that they would be unrecognizable to their earliest adherents. In order to clarify the categorization for this dissertation, 'revival' should be viewed in terms of a resurrection from the dead, while 'survival' would encompass any view of Wicca as ailing to the point of almost failing, but being injected with new life before dying out completely.

It should be noted that Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, of the University of Lund and University of Swansea respectively, have offered an alternative overview perspective. While taking the position that Wicca probably did originate in the twentieth-century, though Gardner is described as having 'exposed' it with the implication that he was not its creator,<sup>71</sup> they made the case for Wicca being both ancient and modern depending upon one's perspective. As there are elements within Wiccan practice and belief that are borrowed from the ancient world, e.g. the deities and their individual attributes, then these elements were not created in the modern day.<sup>72</sup> They also interpreted the centuries old traditions of secret and/or occult societies, continuity of belief in magic, the romanticisation of folklore and 'radical historicisation' of contemporary paganism within each generation, as outlined in Ronald Hutton's essay 'Modern Pagan Witchcraft'<sup>73</sup>, as seeing its latest manifestation in Wicca. Wicca could be seen as part of 'the same transcendent and transhistorical demonism,' and therefore of the same substance and trend, if not precisely the same application, as previous Pagan traditions.<sup>74</sup> This is not the same as either 'survival' or 'revival' insofar as Wicca did not exist before in any form recognizable as Wicca; but neither is it 'invention', as the ancient elements are too great to proclaim it as new.

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<sup>71</sup> B Ankarloo and S Clark (eds), *The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Vol 6: The Twentieth Century*, p ix

<sup>72</sup> Ibid p viii

<sup>73</sup> R Hutton, 'Modern Pagan History', in B Ankarloo and S Clark, *The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Vol 6: The Twentieth Century*, pp 1-79

<sup>74</sup> B Ankarloo and S Clark (eds), *The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Vol 6: The Twentieth Century*, p xi-xii

An anecdote was shared in the documentary, *Humanzee*, which presented the case of Oliver, a mammal who appeared to be a human-chimpanzee hybrid. A judge was asked how much human DNA Oliver would have to possess before he could be tried in a court of law as a human being. The judge responded that he would preside over him, as a human being, if his DNA was more than 50% human.<sup>75</sup> In developing Ankarloo and Clark's argument, similar questions should be asked of religion. How many components of Wicca would have to be demonstrably defined as ancient for it to be justifiably labelled an ancient religious tradition?

The question becomes a matter of definition – what constitutes the birth of a religion? Is it at the first manifestation of a recognizable component, when all components come together or at the application of a name? It may be argued that the true birth of a religion is when it is practised and/or recognized as such by a governmental authority or a legal ruling. There is not scope within this dissertation to explore this specific debate. However its relevance is acknowledged insofar as the origins of Wicca cannot be pin-pointed without identifying the criteria, which needs to manifest, before one can confidently state that a new religion has been born. If this issue was clarified, the criteria could be applied to Wicca in order to determine whether it may be considered to be a religion now; then applied throughout the known history to ascertain whether it has always been the case and, if not, the transition period could be scrutinized for the origins of Wicca as a religion.

The view taken for the purpose of this dissertation is that while a parent tradition might exist, each definable group within it may only chart their birth from the moment when it became distinctly separate. For example, Christianity may be used as an umbrella term to describe Methodism, Catholicism, Baptism, Jehovah's Witnesses and many other distinct variants of Christianity. The tradition which Ankarloo and Clark refer to appears to be Paganism and/or witchcraft, whilst this dissertation is concerned only with the distinctive religion of Wicca. To clarify, Rae Beth wrote,

'In justice to other forms of modern Paganism, I would like to tell you more about them, as well as about witchcraft. But I can't. I can only tell you about what I know - about what I am. I do

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<sup>75</sup> Documentary, '*Humanzee*', Animal Planet Channel, broadcast October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2004.

know that they are all new acorns from the old tree, now growing into new trees. They are a fresh religious impetus...<sup>76</sup>

Continuing the analogy, this dissertation is concerned only with the moment when that acorn fell to create Wicca as a religion separate to any other form of Paganism. Though it is recognized that this can be problematic, insofar as an Old Religion from which it *could* have sprung has not yet been clearly defined beyond the model described by Dr Margaret Murray. There may be antecedents more or less relevant to the definition of modern Wicca. However, the recognition of Wicca as a distinct religion is the point against which the ‘survival’, ‘revival’ and ‘invention’ perspectives will be measured.

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<sup>76</sup> R Beth, ‘*Hedge Witch: A Guide to Solitary Witchcraft*’, p 70

### The Survival Perspective

Until the late 1970s, Wiccans generally believed that their religion was the survival of a Pre-Christian Pagan religion, which had continued underground throughout the domination of Christianity in Britain. It was this initial belief, and subsequently the challenges to that belief, which have fundamentally proved the basis for the developing trends in how Wiccans perceive their own history, hence it is worth focusing in depth upon this strand of the debate.

The impetus connecting Wicca with the ‘survival’ perspective derived primarily from Gardner’s work, which, though stating that the witches themselves did not know their own history, speculated that they were the contemporary representatives of Dr Margaret Murray’s witch-cult.<sup>77</sup> Murray’s research, which will be examined later in this chapter, suggested that a pre-Christian Pagan religion had survived in Europe, throughout the Christian era, before dying out during the witch-hunts of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>78</sup> As other individuals, notably Sybil Leek,<sup>79</sup> Robert Cochrane,<sup>80</sup> and Alex Sanders<sup>81</sup> emerged to provide independent verification that a witchcraft religion had survived even the witch-hunts, there appeared no reason to doubt this history. Then, as will be demonstrated later, the publication of Norman Cohn’s 1975 work, *Europe’s Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt*, destroyed Murray’s academic credibility.<sup>82</sup> Meanwhile, Gardnerians provided evidence to prove that Sanders had been initiated into their tradition in adult life.<sup>83</sup>

The early association between Wicca and Murray’s model of a witch-cult has meant that the unreliability of the latter has effectively undermined the belief that Wicca could represent any coherently surviving Old Religion at all. This may be illustrated by the fact that, in 1993, when Rhiannon Ryall claimed to have been initiated into a non-Gardnerian witchcraft religion fifty years previously,<sup>84</sup> Aidan Kelly was able to respond that her coven was ‘clearly derived from the New Forest

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<sup>77</sup> G Gardner, ‘*Witchcraft Today*’, p 48

<sup>78</sup> M Murray, ‘*The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*’, p 12

<sup>79</sup> S Leek, ‘*Diary of a Witch*’, p 9

<sup>80</sup> J Glass, ‘*Witchcraft: The Sixth Sense*’, p 17

<sup>81</sup> J Johns, ‘*King of the Witches: The World of Alex Sanders*’, p 16

<sup>82</sup> N Cohn, ‘*Europe’s Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt*’ p 109-120

<sup>83</sup> P Crowther, ‘*High Priestess: The Life and Times of Patricia Crowther*’, pp 63-70

<sup>84</sup> R Ryall, ‘*West Country Wicca: A Journal of the Old Religion*’, p 1

coven... (practising) rituals as they were worked before Gardner re-wrote them<sup>85</sup> and indicated only that ‘the personnel of the original New Forest group had become widely scattered by the end of the war’.<sup>86</sup> That this view does not appear to have been challenged shows how persuasively the legacy of Murray, and her subsequent discreditation, still defines the Wiccan perception of their roots.<sup>87</sup>

Dr Margaret Murray was seen to endorse Gardner’s claim to have uncovered a modern-day witch-cult, in *Witchcraft Today*, by writing its introduction and it is worth observing that Murray must have been highly respected as an academic. She was Assistant Professor in Egyptology, at University College London, from 1924-1935, then President of the Folklore Society between 1953-1955.<sup>88</sup> In context, she achieved associate membership of the Professoriate only five years after women over thirty were allowed to vote; five years before the franchise was extended to include women over twenty-one years of age.<sup>89</sup> Even in 2002-03, after decades of gender equality measures, women made up only 14% of the British Professoriate.<sup>90</sup> It might be supposed that such achievements by a female academic in the 1920s reflects determination, courage and above all an extremely keen and astute intelligence; but these attributes do not necessarily prove that her theories about witchcraft were correct.

In 1971, Keith Thomas wrote that Murray’s theories about witchcraft had ‘made some influential converts.’<sup>91</sup> This was an observation elaborated upon by Norman Cohn, in 1975, when he noted Murray’s ‘considerable influence’ amongst historians, scholars of witchcraft and ‘more or less serious readers’, whilst holding her responsible for the modern-day proliferation of organised witchcraft.<sup>92</sup> By 1981, Colin Wilson was able to reflect favourably upon the significance of Murray’s involvement in the reception given to Wicca, when he concluded that,

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<sup>85</sup> A Kelly, ‘*Crafting the Art of Magic: Book 1: A History of Modern Witchcraft, 1939-1964*’, p 41

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, p 42

<sup>87</sup> As an initiate in the early 1990s, I can testify that I was taught that any belief in the Murray model was to be treated with a large pinch of salt.

<sup>88</sup> D Valiente, ‘*An ABC of Witchcraft*’, p 249

<sup>89</sup> J Nicol, ‘*Twentieth Century Britain*’, p 20-21

<sup>90</sup> ‘*The Times Higher Education Supplement*’, July 23<sup>rd</sup> 2004, p 11

<sup>91</sup> K Thomas, ‘*Religion and the Decline of Magic*’ p 614

<sup>92</sup> N Cohn, ‘*Europe’s Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt*’ p 108

‘... the fact that Gardner’s book contained an approving introduction by Margaret Murray indicates that witchcraft has ceased to carry sinister overtones, and can once again be studied with detachment.’<sup>93</sup>

However, an analysis of the introduction leaves the reader with the impression that either Dr Murray had not read the book or else she was dubious about its contents. This intuition is supported by anecdotal evidence, reported by Oates and Wood, which suggested that Murray did not approve of Wicca and considered its practitioners to be ‘idiots’.<sup>94</sup>

The introduction is a mere three paragraphs in length, throughout which she appears dismissive of the worshippers, whom she calls ‘the so-called ‘witches’’<sup>95</sup> practising ‘so-called ‘witchcraft’.’<sup>96</sup> She also implied that the practitioners worship the Christian God, as

‘(their rituals are) the sincere expression of that feeling towards God which is expressed, perhaps more decorously through not more sincerely, by modern Christianity in church services.’<sup>97</sup>

Murray also stated confidently, ‘(Wicca) has nothing to do with spell-casting and other evil practices.’<sup>98</sup> This view and tone is at odds with the main body of *Witchcraft Today*, where the narrative takes as read that witchcraft *does* exist in the modern day, with its practitioners calling themselves witches; that there is both a God and a Goddess, with the latter taking precedence;<sup>99</sup> and spell-crafting is very much a part of Wicca.<sup>100</sup>

It is difficult to know how to interpret the mixed messages evident in a careful reading of the introduction. Murray must have been aware that her position, as the primary academic expert on the survival of an old religion, meant that her introducing a book, which claimed the continued survival of

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<sup>93</sup> C Wilson, ‘Witchcraft’ in C Wilson and J Grant (edit), *The Directory of Possibilities* p 88

<sup>94</sup> C Oates and J Woods, *A Coven of Scholars: Margaret Murray and her Working Methods*, p 22

<sup>95</sup> M Murray, ‘Introduction’, in G Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, p 15

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, p 16

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, p 16

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, p 16

<sup>99</sup> G Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, p 45

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, p

that religion in the modern day, would imply her endorsement of this view. A casual reader may have assumed that Murray had investigated the coven and declared them genuine, simply because of her willingness to associate her name and reputation with Wicca in this way. But though Murray twice comments upon the Wicca representing ‘a true survival and not a mere revival copied out of books,’<sup>101</sup> she accredits this view to Gardner and does not state her own. Perhaps she was hedging her bets, unwilling to equivocably dismiss them in case further research did confirm their antiquity, and consequently prove her own theories beyond a shadow of a doubt; but was suspicious enough to word her comments in such a way as to demonstrate her scepticism should the opposite prove true.

However, this differing approach does not appear to have been an issue in the Wiccan debates thereon. Beyond noting that Murray provided the introduction, focus has been directed upon the cross-fertilization of historical/folklore ideas, between the early Wiccans and Murray. Gardner did not claim, as is commonly supposed, that Wicca is proven to have survived the millennia with its roots in a prehistoric society. He stated that ‘the witches do not know the origin of their cult. My own theory is... that it is a Stone Age cult of the matriarchal times’;<sup>102</sup> the implication of antiquity is there, but offered only as unsupported speculation. This is a conclusion almost certainly derived from Murray’s research, which had been published in *The Witch-cult in Western Europe* (1921) and *The God of the Witches* (1933), and perpetuated by a series of writers, notably Pennethorne Hughes, in his book, *Witchcraft* (1952), as will be demonstrated below in a summary of Murray’s theories.

Murray’s hypothesis had been that ‘underlying the Christian religion was a cult practised by many classes of the community... (which) can be traced back to pre-Christian times, and appears to be the ancient religion of Western Europe... (whose) god... was worshipped in well-defined rites; (whose) organization was highly developed; and... ritual is analogous to many other ancient rituals.’<sup>103</sup> Aristocrats were the first to convert to Christianity, which then slowly progressed down the classes, strengthening until, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, it was strong enough to start eradicating all opposition to its tenets in the subsequent witch-hunts.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> M Murray, ‘Introduction’, in G Gardner, ‘*Witchcraft Today*’, p 15

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, p 48

<sup>103</sup> M Murray, ‘*The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*’, p 12

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, p 19

Her evidence was interpreted from sources contemporary to the witch trials in Britain, including judicial records and pamphlets or the works of the Inquisitors themselves.<sup>105</sup> Not only did the Christian recorders of these testimonies habitually replace the title ‘god’ with ‘devil’ (or a variation, such as Satan or Lucifer),<sup>106</sup> but these ‘deities’ appear to have actually been other humans held in high regard within their covens.<sup>107</sup> These people often wore masks or other apparel in an animal form, either as disguise from identification or an invocation of nature deities, which may also account for the mention of ‘familiars’ common to many of the testimonies.<sup>108</sup> Practitioners belonged to the cult from birth, introduced by their parents,<sup>109</sup> but an adult could convert as long as certain conditions were met.<sup>110</sup>

Murray’s research also described large public assemblies called Sabbats; while the Esbats were smaller, private rituals.<sup>111</sup> There was no standard rite for the Sabbat, though they generally began with homage to the ‘devil’; a report upon magic undertaken since the last Sabbat; cases to be considered, plus instruction upon them; announcements of marriages and any other business; followed by the religious part of the assembly, feasting and dancing.<sup>112</sup> Finally, Murray proposed that fairies were actually an indigenous human race, which had passed on its religious practice to invading Celts, Anglo-Saxons and Normans, which had survived in the manner already summarized until the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>113</sup>

Murray’s reconstruction of the Old Religion was not accepted in its entirety by Gardner, when he compared it to the Wica of the New Forest coven, though he did embrace the central thesis that an Old Religion had survived. For example, on the subject of ‘witch marks’, Gardner wrote,

‘I have never seen or heard of these among witches. Dr Murray suggests that there were tattoo marks as a means of recognition. It think it very probable that in the burning times something of the sort was used, but the ones I know have never heard of it except in Dr Murray’s book *Witchcraft in Western Europe* and *The God of the Witches*, in which they are very interested.

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<sup>105</sup> M Murray, ‘*The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*’, p 12

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, p 31

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, p 47

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, p 60-61

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, p 73

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, p 74

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, p 97

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, p 124

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, p 238

Witches feel they owe a debt of gratitude to Dr Murray for being the first to tell them that they were not the poisoners, diabolists or impostors that practically all other writers call them.<sup>114</sup>

Thus the implication is that not only Gardner, but the New Forest witches too had read Murray's books. Elsewhere he confirmed as fact certain theories proposed by Murray, for example, Gardner identified the 'devil' as the High Priest,<sup>115</sup> though he stated that it was the women who have the senior role within the coven.<sup>116</sup> He also expounded, as if they were his own theories, other ideas raised by Murray, for example, that fairies were an indigenous human race.<sup>117</sup> The conclusion seems to be that Gardner definitely used Murray's work as a touchstone, more often than is immediately obvious without a prior knowledge of her hypotheses, but he did not draw upon it exclusively and those individual aspects which he did support were not always accepted in their entirety.

A subsequent writer, Justine Glass, reconstructed the history of witchcraft between 1700, when Murray claims that the witch-cult died out, and its 20<sup>th</sup> century re-emergence. She painted a picture of witch families or 'scattered covens, cut from contact with colleagues through centuries of persecution', each practising the fragmentary remembrances of the Craft based on whatever its people had known when they became separated from other adherents at the time of the witch-hunts.<sup>118</sup> Later, Glass reported that members of the modern Craft regretted 'these schisms and the dissociation which has scattered covens like islands in an archipelago.'<sup>119</sup> Without source citation, it must be assumed that Glass received her insight into this period from the witches she interviewed in the mid-1960s;<sup>120</sup> though they could also be conclusions reached by an uncritical reading of Murray's work, bolstered by a general acceptance of her theories by the contemporary witches.

It was not until the 1970s that Murray's research was successfully challenged. This was important to the practitioners themselves, who had generally and uncritically believed that they were indeed members of a religion, within the model proposed by Murray, which had survived persecution during

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<sup>114</sup> G Gardner, 'Witchcraft Today', p 176

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, p 154

<sup>116</sup> G Gardner, 'The Meaning of Witchcraft', p 123

<sup>117</sup> G Gardner, 'Witchcraft Today', p 63

<sup>118</sup> J Glass, 'Witchcraft, The Sixth Sense', p 14

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, p 133

<sup>120</sup> The author's foreword notes that 'much of my material came from the witches (who prefer to remain anonymous)', J Glass, 'Witchcraft, The Sixth Sense', p 12

the witch-hunts in order to survive into the present day. Their practice of secrecy and the adoption of magical names was supposed to have derived from those days of persecution, when identification of individuals within the religion could have resulted in their torture and execution. Intrinsically woven, the ritual of Wicca and the research of Murray formed the foundation of the Wiccan religion itself. Therefore when first Thomas, then, to a greater extent, Cohn, challenged Murray's theories, it undermined Wiccan identity and brought into question, within the religion, many of their own religious practices. It is worth examining in depth not only Murray, but those arguments against her 'survival' theory which impacted so greatly upon Wiccan development.

In 1971, Keith Thomas criticized the 'survival' theory on the basis that Murray's sources were extremely selective, and ignored other similar sources that would have rendered groundless her hypothesis. Also she never proved that the word 'coven' meant what she stated it meant in England.<sup>121</sup> Because of the inadequacy of her sources, Thomas concluded that 'in England... there never was a 'witch-cult' of the type envisaged by contemporary demonologists or their modern disciples.'<sup>122</sup> However, it was the organization of the witches, rather than the fact that there were magical practitioners at all, which Thomas questioned.

Five years later, Norman Cohn challenged Murray's theories so successfully that Murray's work has become largely discredited amongst British and American academics, though the rest of Europe's scholars have been more tolerant. The feeling there has been that though the methodology was inadequate, there may be something in the hypothesis itself.<sup>123</sup> In short, Cohn denied that there had been a survival of pre-Christian Paganism in the form of a witch-cult,<sup>124</sup> and denounced her conclusions as 'sheer fantasy.'<sup>125</sup> He also launched a personal attack upon Murray's suitability to undertake any academic research on the subject of witchcraft, proclaiming that the Associate Professor had only a 'superficial' grasp of European history, a 'non-existent' grasp of method, either had not read her sources or had not assimilated them, and implied that, at nearly sixty years of age during her research, her 'exaggerated and distorted' ideas had become too firmly set for objectivity.<sup>126</sup> However,

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<sup>121</sup> K Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p 614

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, p 616

<sup>123</sup> C Oates and J Woods, *A Coven of Scholars: Margaret Murray and her Working Methods*, p 31

<sup>124</sup> N Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt*

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, p 119

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, p 109

Cohn did not simply dismiss the ‘survival’ theory, he proposed an alternative hypothesis to explain the witch-hunts, as will be seen, the acceptance of which would naturally be incompatible with Murray’s theories.

Central to Cohn’s argument is that, throughout history, there are basic charges that may be deemed so heinous that their perpetrators must be acting ‘against human nature’ and therefore their ‘relationship to mankind as a whole can only be one of implacable enmity.’ These acts can be broadly categorized as: incest; the worship of a man’s genitals; the killing and eating of babies or children; and cannibalism.<sup>127</sup> In the West, from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, apostasy could also be added to the list.<sup>128</sup> He proceeded to highlight where these accusations have been made time and time again, whenever one group wishes to reduce the credibility and/or annihilate another.

He concluded by demonstrating how this list of inhuman crimes manifest in other areas, for example, fairy tales, such as ‘Hansel and Gretel’, where cannibalism and infanticide is a theme encapsulated in the witch attempting to eat the children before being burnt to death in her own oven, or mythological tales, such as Tantalus cooking his son Pelops as a meal for the gods.<sup>129</sup> The entire list could be explained in terms of repressed psychology:

1. Cannibalism and infanticide derive from inter-generational tension or the ‘wishes and anxieties experienced in infancy or early childhood’;<sup>130</sup>
2. Orgies, and presumably the worship of male genitalia, were the projections of ‘desires or... feared temptations’;<sup>131</sup>
3. Apostasy was a revolt against a religion that ‘exalt(ed) spiritual values at the expense of the animal side of nature’.<sup>132</sup>

None of those actually projecting these inner fears or repressed longings onto the target groups actually *knew* that the charge sheets derived from their own psychology. Instead Cohn argued that it was

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<sup>127</sup> N Cohn, ‘*Europe’s Inner Demons: An Inquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt*’, p 12

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, p 97

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, p 260

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, p 261

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, p 261

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, p 262

‘*unconscious* resentment against Christianity as too strict a religion, against Christ as too stern a taskmaster... the need to create a scapegoat for an unacknowledged hostility to Christianity... (and) in that case the tens of thousands of victims who perished would not be primarily victims of village tensions but victims of an unconscious revolt against a religion which, consciously, was still accepted without question.’<sup>133</sup>

Cohn also subscribed to the belief that if any part of a source can be shown to be inaccurate or fabricated, then the whole source must be dismissed entirely. This view became more extreme as his arguments progressed throughout the examples provided. Early on, while discussing Dualism (i.e. the belief in both God and the Devil) as manifested in Christian groups deemed heretical by the dominant Catholic powers, Cohn comments that ‘where a source contains untrustworthy or demonstrably false statements it should be treated with scepticism throughout’.<sup>134</sup> By the time that Cohn was addressing the evidence surrounding the witch-hunts of the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, his view is that dismissal rather than scepticism is in order.

‘My grounds for not accepting even in part the tales of witches’ Sabbats, as they were retailed from the fifteenth century onwards, have been made abundantly clear in the course of the present chapter. In my view, stories which contain manifestly impossible elements ought not to be accepted as evidence for physical events.’<sup>135</sup>

In other words, Murray’s conclusions relied upon evidence which Cohn felt ought to have been dismissed as entirely unreliable.

However, it may be countered that scepticism should not imply complete dismissal, simply that the source should be interrogated with a view that it may contain less obvious fabrications or inaccuracies. This is an approach which it is expected that all scholars apply to their sources, in the knowledge that its author’s subjective concerns, circumstances, objectives and intended readership influences the creation of a source in a variety of ways. Recognizing these influences inform an interpretation of the

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<sup>133</sup> N Cohn, ‘*Europe’s Inner Demons: An Inquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt*’, p 262

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, p 57

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, p 124

source itself, but it is a fallacy to conclude that a single fabrication automatically proves the rest of the evidence is false, just as a demonstrable truth would not preclude the possibility of falsehood elsewhere. Even a source which can be demonstrably shown to contain no truth at all may still be useful to an investigation into its intended purpose, whether it was accepted truth by its contemporary readership and what influence it subsequently engendered.

Cohn's main contention with Murray's work seems to be with her methodology and specifically her view that once the fantastical or patently impossible elements of each testimony had been stripped away, then what remained could be interpreted as having some basis in fact. Cohn countered that any fantastical element at all discredits the whole source and, as he could not find a source supporting Murray's hypothesis which did not contain some fantastical element, he concluded that there were no organized witch-cults.

Cohn's arguments have not been completely unchallenged. Caroline Oates and Juliette Wood, writing for the Folklore Society, defended Murray's methodology, stating that it was comparable to contemporary contributors to the Folklore Society.<sup>136</sup> Additionally, they concluded that Murray did have the intellectual capacity to consider and evaluate the reliability of the evidence, citing a 'letter to (another professor which) shows her as rather less relentless in her attitudes to folklore than some of the more far-fetched theories in her books might imply.'<sup>137</sup>

Jeffrey Russell, while arguing that Wicca was invented by Gardner, cautiously defended Murray's thesis commenting that 'most recent historians have taken the unwarranted position that it contains no truth at all,'<sup>138</sup> a position shared by Carlo Ginzburg, who believed that it had a 'kernel of truth', only in that witchcraft did have roots in an ancient fertility cult and that the Sabbats did take place.<sup>139</sup> Ronald Hutton also added that, despite Murray's methodology being unreliable, no scholar has yet proved her actual conclusions wrong.<sup>140</sup> Indeed, Hutton's own research has heralded a partial reappraisal of those conclusions,

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<sup>136</sup> C Oates and J Woods, 'A Coven of Scholars: Margaret Murray and her Working Methods', p 32

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, pg 35

<sup>138</sup> J Russell, 'The History of Witchcraft', p 152

<sup>139</sup> C Ginzburg, 'Night Battles', p xiii, quoted in R Hutton, 'Triumph of the Moon', p 277

<sup>140</sup> R Hutton, 'Stations of the Sun', p 425-426

‘The result is effectively a full-blooded reapplication of the theory of ‘survivals’ to folk customs, which has recently become so unpopular amongst folklorists. The distinction here, however is that the ‘Old Religion’ which is being sought in this exercise is not a putative one concealed in the shades of pagan antiquity, but a well-documented one, which was brought to an end only four to five centuries ago.’<sup>141</sup>

Hutton cited the work of folklorist Theo Brown, historians Tessa Watt and Sir Keith Thomas, and his own research published in *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, each of whom had independently uncovered evidence of an organized Old Religion, which survived at least until the Reformation in Britain. This evidence did not rely upon confessions given under torture, but on printed broadsides, ballads, folklore and a study of ghost stories undertaken to determine attitudes towards death and the after-life, each of which illuminated belief systems which could not be explained within Christian doctrine.<sup>142</sup>

Vivienne Crowley has also challenged Cohn’s view, stating that it did not take into account those who were executed while still professing faith in their Paganism, which she found curious if a witch-cult did not exist.<sup>143</sup> Even within Cohn’s own methodology, this is a valid point, as he deems heroic the stand made by Jacques de Molay, grandmaster of the Knights Templars, who recanted his confession, made under torture, in order to ‘solemnly declare... that the rule of the order had always been holy and righteous and Catholic, and that the order was altogether innocent of the heresies and sins of which it had been accused’; a stand for which he was promptly burned at the stake.<sup>144</sup> Cohn views this as de Molay providing proof that the Knights Templars were victims of a vicious and fatal smear campaign against them, but does not mention the exact same situation as it presented itself amongst the witches.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> R Hutton, ‘*Stations of the Sun*’, p 416

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, p 416-417

<sup>143</sup> V Crowley, ‘*Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Age*’, pp 46-47

<sup>144</sup> N Cohn, ‘*Europe’s Inner Demons: An Inquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt*’, p 97

<sup>145</sup> M Murray, ‘*The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*’, p 25 (NB The examples provided by Dr Murray were in French, which I do not speak. They were kindly translated for the purpose of this dissertation by a friend, Andrea Wakely.)

In conclusion, the case for the 'survival' perspective has not been conclusively proved nor inarguably demolished. There are fundamental flaws in both the evidence and its interpretation on each side of the debate, yet it is this debate that is key to Wiccan understanding of their own history and to scholarly research into the issue. It may be that Wicca itself is evidence of the survival of an organized witch-cult. As has already been noted, Murray appeared to be hedging her bets, neither dismissing nor unequivocally embracing Wicca as both a living religion and verification of her theories. Her writing, therefore, provides a framework of belief for Wicca, but does not in itself provide evidence of survival.

If Gardner did discover a coven of witches in the New Forest, whose membership could provide oral evidence of collective and organized working in the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>146</sup> and written evidence, which he alleged had been penned during the witch-hunts of the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries,<sup>147</sup> then this is an independent source which supports Murray's hypothesis without the need to rely upon testimonies obtained under torture. Conversely, if Gardner can be proved to have fabricated his evidence, or misinterpreted it, the opposite is true. Therefore, it is in reaction to the debate surrounding the 'survival' perspective that both the 'revival' and 'invention' perspectives have been formed, which, in turn, will fuel the on-going 'survivals' debate, until conclusive evidence either way can be produced.

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<sup>146</sup> J L Bracelin, *'Gerald Gardner: Witch'*, p 152

<sup>147</sup> G Gardner, *'Witchcraft Today'*, p 57

### The 'Revival' Perspective

This perspective may be broken into two distinct strands: those who believe that the group reviving a witchcraft religion included Gardner (though not necessarily as its instigator or director) and those who believe that he was initiated into it at a later date. Currently, these appear to be the most common perspectives amongst scholars; for example, Douglas Ezzy (2003) took the view that Gardner had been initiated into an existing 'traditional witchcraft' coven, but had developed Wicca from it in partnership with Doreen Valiente;<sup>148</sup> and Ronald Hutton (2004) leaned towards either one of these strands, or a mixture of the two, on the basis of probability and likeliness based on the currently available evidence.<sup>149</sup> Practitioners also share this view, for example, Janet Farrar and Gavin Bone (2004) described Gardner's contribution as a 'reconstruction of witchcraft'.<sup>150</sup>

The major difference between the 'survival' and 'revival' perspectives is a matter of continuity. Those propagating a 'survival' theory are envisioning an unbroken line of religious practice from pre-Christian times to the present day. The 'revivalists' merely state that a twentieth-century group did not invent witchcraft from scratch; it existed previously as a practice and/or a religion, which this group simply developed or reconstructed from surviving fragments. However, when and where this religion previously existed is not clear. Gardner described the condition of the Craft in 1954 as 'doomed', as younger generations within the witch families were not interested in initiation, 'so the coven dies out or consists of old and dying people'.<sup>151</sup> There are no reliable statistics informing about the current number of Wiccans in Britain, but it is certain that a dramatic reversal of Gardner's assessment has occurred in the intervening fifty years. If it is accepted that a pre-Gardnerian Wicca did exist, then this is the revival in action.

The belief that Gardner revived an existing practice is not a new strand of the debate, though the arguments and speculation have generally been formed around the view that Wicca manifested after practitioners of witchcraft became influenced by ideas originating within at least one of the existing

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<sup>148</sup> D Ezzy, *Practising the Witch's Craft: Real Magic Under a Southern Sky*, pp 11-12

<sup>149</sup> R Hutton, *Witches, Druids and King Arthur* p 282

<sup>150</sup> J Farrar and G Bone, *Progressive Witchcraft*, p 24

<sup>151</sup> G Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, p 152

occult or secret societies. A brief summary of these arguments does reveal how pervasive the idea is that Wicca is not pure witchcraft, but contains something else too.

In 1971, Robert Graves viewed Wicca as having a basis in traditional witchcraft, which had been taken up and reinterpreted by ‘a group of theosophists’, before undergoing a further metamorphosis under Gardner’s eclectic influence.<sup>152</sup> A contemporary writer, Colin Wilson was also taking as read the existence of traditional witchcraft, implying that Wicca was a strand of this tradition which had become influenced by Aleister Crowley and the Golden Dawn.<sup>153</sup> Doreen Valiente herself considered the origins to be along similar lines, with a traditional coven initiating a group of Co-Masons, who were Gardner’s link into it, though she stressed that the ensuing witchcraft had nothing to do with Co-Masonry.<sup>154</sup>

By the 1980s, Francis King and Isabelle Sutherland had proposed that the tradition could have been formed no earlier than 1875, as its tenet of reincarnation had not been known within the Western Occult Tradition before that date.<sup>155</sup> Vivienne Crowley considered the claims, made in the Pagan press, that a traditional witch named George Pickingill had established the New Forest coven, but he too had knowledge of both the Freemasons and the magical societies of the previous two centuries.<sup>156</sup>

In the 1990s, Ronald Hutton conducted research into the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry, which, though neither secret nor occult, did arguably contain Wiccan elements and was located in the New Forest.<sup>157</sup> A few years later, his work culminating in *The Triumph of the Moon* was an exercise in sifting through what was known about witchcraft, Paganism, magical/occult and secret societies during the last two centuries, in an attempt to identify the origins of modern witchcraft. The results, though groundbreaking and invaluable, were inconclusive on the issue of what precisely existed in terms of religious practice for the New Forest coven at the point when Gardner entered Wiccan history. However, this was explicable in terms that Gardnerian witchcraft was the first to be securely

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<sup>152</sup> R Graves, ‘Modern Witchcraft’, in P Haining, ‘*The Necromancers*’, p 24

<sup>153</sup> C Wilson, ‘*The Occult*’, pp 596-600

<sup>154</sup> D Valiente, ‘*An ABC of Witchcraft*’, p 153-154

<sup>155</sup> F King and I Sutherland, ‘*The Rebirth of Magic*’, pp 201

<sup>156</sup> V Crowley, ‘*Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Age*’, pp 46-49

<sup>157</sup> R Hutton, ‘The Roots of Modern Paganism’, in G Harvey and C Hardman, ‘*Pagan Pathways*’, pp 3-13

documented and pre-Gardnerian witch groups could well have avoided written records, while also being discreet about their practices.<sup>158</sup>

Whilst Hutton has taken the overview, the main research into the New Forest coven itself has been undertaken by Philip Heselton within the past half a decade. Heselton is firmly within the ‘revivalist’ camp,

‘It seemed clear to me quite early in my researches that (Gardner) had contributed a lot to the Craft, but I was equally clear that he had not invented it and indeed I found that I could identify those who taught him.’<sup>159</sup>

By investigating the verifiable facts provided by Gardner, plus studying the individuals living in Christchurch during the 1930s and 1940s, Heselton was able to amass an impressive catalogue of admittedly circumstantial evidence, which supported Gardner’s claims. These were detailed in *Wiccan Roots: Gerald Gardner and the Modern Witchcraft Revival* and included three chapters collating and analyzing all that could be found about the enigmatic Dorothy Clutterbuck,<sup>160</sup> the identification of ‘Dafo’,<sup>161</sup> and a speculative identification of the other members of the New Forest coven.<sup>162</sup> In analysis, probability renders it likely that Gardner was telling the truth about his introduction into the Craft.

In both the aforementioned book and more particularly his sequel, *Gerald Gardner and the Cauldron of Inspiration*, Heselton was also establishing that Gardner and/or the people whom Heselton had identified as probable coven members were also members, or had contacts within the membership of, the occult or secret societies whose influences have long been discerned in Wicca. In short, the revival could well have been as supposed, a coupling of traditional witchcraft with elements of Theosophy, the Golden Dawn, Freemasonry, the Co-Masons and a myriad of other contemporary groups, as access to that knowledge was in abundance within the identified cohort.

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<sup>158</sup> R Hutton, ‘*The Triumph of the Moon*’, p 288

<sup>159</sup> P Heselton, ‘*Gerald Gardner and the Cauldron of Inspiration*’, p 15

<sup>160</sup> P Heselton, ‘*Wiccan Roots: Gerald Gardner and the Modern Witchcraft Revival*’, pp 126-205

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, pp 116

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*, pp 205-217

In conclusion, the ‘revival’ perspective is filled with circumstantial evidence, which renders it the most convincing of the possible strands of the debates to explain the origins of Wicca, if only because the others have even less evidence; however there is no ‘smoking gun’ which conclusively proves that Gardner did not invent the religion itself. There is no documentation pre-dating Gardner’s involvement, which points inarguably to Wicca having existed in anything like its post-Gardnerian form; while all of the subsequent testimonies of an hereditary coven structure, e.g. the Cochrane Tradition, emerged after the Wiccan publicity and therefore could have been informed by it.

The likelihood does appear to be that the Old Religion, in its shamanistic form and/or goddess worship, assimilated elements of the contemporary occult or secret societies, but it is still unclear whether this radically altered the existing witchcraft to the point where it could be proclaimed a new religion or if witchcraft continued to act according to its nature of constant evolution. Neither is it clear when the assimilation of other magical traditions occurred or when the name of Wica or Wicca was applied to the practice itself.

### The Invention Perspective

Dr Aidan Kelly is the major proponent of the view that Gerald Gardner invented Wicca, though in collaboration with various partners throughout the period 1939-1964. This differs from the previous category, though with obvious overlaps, in that Gardner is here considered as the main driving force behind the creation of a new religious movement, its name, theology and practice; where nothing had preceded it in any form that could be recognized as parenting Wicca, although the occult traditions were available.

Kelly's argument, based on studying Gardner's private papers and supplemented with the testimonies of early Gardnerians, was that on September 28<sup>th</sup>, 1939, Gardner and a company of interested occultists had decided to create a religion based upon the witch-cult described by Margaret Murray.<sup>163</sup> As the detail in her books did not lend themselves to a fully formed practice of a religion, Gardner had copied wholesale paragraphs from the works of Aleister Crowley, amongst others.<sup>164</sup> The constituency of his coven was in a constant state of flux, with various members making significant contributions to the text of the Wiccan *Book of Shadows*, particularly Doreen Valiente.<sup>165</sup> However, Gardner remained the main authority within the religion, until his death in 1964.<sup>166</sup>

Despite not including Norman Cohn's *Europe's Inner Demons* in his bibliography, it is evidentially a point of reference for Kelly's conclusions, in that hypotheses raised by Cohn are explored as potential motives for the foundation of Wicca. For example, Kelly appears to make an unqualified leap from citing Murray's speculation, that female witches viewed sex within a magical context as boosting the fertility of the land, into claiming that sexual intercourse is a part of Wicca because,

‘... insofar as the Craft is conceived as a rebellion against Christianity, that rebellion would obviously focus on and emphasize the aspect of human nature to which Christianity was most opposed.’<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> A Kelly, ‘*Crafting the Art of Magic: Book 1: A History of Modern Witchcraft, 1939-1964*’, p 30-31

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, p 36-37

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, p 42

<sup>166</sup> Ibid p 179

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, p 40

As Murray had not mentioned Christianity in this context, and Kelly does not explain how, why or when the Craft became a vehicle for revolt against Christianity, that statement makes no sense until it is compared with Cohn's conclusion that witch-hunts occurred because inquisitors and mob alike are subconsciously rebelling against Christianity.<sup>168</sup> By reference to this, Kelly actually goes further than Cohn by inverting his theory. While Cohn believed that the witch-hunts occurred because people projected their repressed fears onto an innocent section of their communities, Kelly implies that Wiccans themselves are practicing their religion because of the same inner demons.

However, Kelly never qualifies his statement that the Craft *is* a rebellion against Christianity, nor cites evidence to support it. He does, however, state that Gardner himself had cause to hate Christianity, again with sexual undertones,

‘Being beaten in the name of Christianity was a major reason... for Swinburne’s famous hatred of Christianity... Gardner was certainly beaten by Con, but like Aleister Crowley, he did not settle for passively hating Christianity. Instead he set out to replace Christianity.’<sup>169</sup>

The natural progression of this argument would therefore be the implication that Gardner and, by extension, Wiccans also commit infanticide, cannibalism and apostasy,<sup>170</sup> or other items on the list of inhuman crimes, which included orgy and worship of genitalia,<sup>171</sup> which are the other manifestations of the inner rebellion against Christianity as perceived by Cohn. Kelly does not venture this far, though he did suggest that Gardner created Wicca as a means by which to satisfy his sado-masochistic sexual needs.<sup>172</sup> While appearing to be a straightforward psychological projection, there are flaws in Kelly's argument.

Josephine McCombie, known as ‘Com’ not ‘Con’, was Gardner's Nanny, hired to accompany him as he wintered abroad to alleviate his chronic asthma, from the age of four years old;<sup>173</sup> this pattern

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<sup>168</sup> A Kelly, ‘*Crafting the Art of Magic: Book 1: A History of Modern Witchcraft, 1939-1964*’, p 262

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, p 28

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, p 12

<sup>171</sup> N Cohn, ‘*Europe's Inner Demons: An Inquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt*’, p 261

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, p 182

<sup>173</sup> JL Bracelin, ‘*Gerald Gardner: Witch*’, p 15

continued throughout his childhood until, when he was sixteen years old, Com married and moved permanently to Ceylon, taking Gardner with her.<sup>174</sup> He lived with, and worked for, the couple until he was eighteen, whereupon he moved out and secured independent employment,<sup>175</sup> yet remained a close neighbour for several years more. Bracelin, whose only source was Gardner, does state that Com was abusive, but Christianity is not mentioned at all,

‘Whenever they were away from home, one of Com’s main interests seemed to be to deny him whatever he wanted. If he asked for something, it was refused; if he acquired something, it was taken away. He was not allowed to talk to other children. Too many requests, and he might be beaten.’<sup>176</sup>

Was Com a Christian? The picture presented of her was as a young woman viewing these trips as a manhunt, drinking, singing, flirting, and holding frequent parties, which once resulted in the local Accra missionaries pressurizing them to leave the area.<sup>177</sup> She believed in Hell, insofar as she told the small boy in her keeping that he was bound to go there.<sup>178</sup> But there is no mention of Gardner having stepped foot in a church throughout his time with Com; and the first time he saw a Bible was when he was eighteen, and an American relative presented him with one.<sup>179</sup> The conclusion must be that, even if Com nominally was a Christian, it was not a dominant part of her life and was not passed onto Gardner himself. This undermines Kelly’s view that Gardner’s rebellion against Christianity, as it was presented by an abusive nanny, could have been one of his motivations for inventing Wicca.

Kelly’s main argument, that everything within the Gardnerian *Book of Shadows* can be traced to a known, public source, which therefore proves his creation of Wicca, has been discussed in a previous chapter and found to be explainable. But to recap for the sake of completeness, the Wiccan *Book of Shadows* cannot be viewed as an immutable collection of prescribed dogma, in the same way as an Islamic Koran or a Judaic Torah. It is regarded more as a journal of each witch’s subjective spiritual concepts or magical workings and, as such, is supposed to be added to, amended or totally rewritten as

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<sup>174</sup> JL Bracelin, ‘*Gerald Gardner: Witch*’, p 17

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, p 26

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, p 17

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, p 17-18

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, p 19

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, p 27

each witch progresses. It is therefore perfectly acceptable that Gardner did write his own *Book of Shadows*. Also, grimoires, day books and other magical literature, which share many of the distinctions of a *Book of Shadows* have been found throughout the past five hundred years, amongst the ‘Cunning-folk’, so it is not beyond the realms of possibility that Gardner was able to acquire one either directly or through a member of the New Forest coven.

Kelly’s assertion that Gardner invented Wicca was supported by Jeffrey Russell, who further speculated that Dorothy Clutterbuck (Gardner’s named initiator) had never existed.<sup>180</sup> This assumption was proved incorrect by Doreen Valiente, who was able to track down Clutterbuck’s birth, marriage and death certificates, while also discovering that she had been a neighbour of Gardner’s in Christchurch.<sup>181</sup> This research was considered so valuable that John Belham-Payne, of the Centre for Pagan Studies, was later to write in reference to it that ‘Doreen salvaged the credibility of Gardner and consequently the Craft.’<sup>182</sup> Philip Heselton’s *Wiccan Roots* was later able to supply a comprehensive biography of Dorothy St Quintin Clutterbuck.<sup>183</sup>

In conclusion, this is a strand of the debate that is still very under-developed and thus far, there has been little proposed which supports the likelihood that Gardner devised Wicca, as a completely new tradition. There are few arguments to interrogate and those which have been proposed, largely by or in reaction to Aidan Kelly, are fundamentally flawed.

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<sup>180</sup> J Russell, ‘*The History of Witchcraft*’, p 152-153

<sup>181</sup> D Valiente, ‘The Search for Old Dorothy’, in S & J Farrar, ‘*The Witches’ Way*’, pp 285-293

<sup>182</sup> J Belham-Payne, ‘*Doreen Valiente: Charge of the Goddess*’, p 79

<sup>183</sup> P Heselton, ‘*Wiccan Roots: Gerald Gardner and the Modern Witchcraft Revival*’, pp 126-156

### **The Origins of Wicca – A Conclusion**

This dissertation has been written by a Wiccan practitioner. The intention has, naturally, been to provide a work of scholarly discourse, yet there are polarities between this and witchcraft practice. Tension has been caused between the need to provide solid evidence, in order to support or reject arguments as they arose in the discussion, and the knowledge that should a scholar interrogate one's own documents in order to determine Wicca as it is defined and practiced by myself, then much would be missed. The academic can find no evidence to support the durability of witchcraft, as a surviving religion, throughout the millennia; the Wiccan understands why that may be so. The very malleability of the religion, in one's own experience, has been its strength. It can encompass elements of many other religions or philosophies, yet has at its core the hallmarks of the Old Religion, as shamanism and goddess worship; thus it may take a multiplicity of forms which, in turn, obscure it from scholarly view. But this is the position of a single practitioner and the difficulty in obtaining a standard, broadly accepted definition from either practitioners or academics has already been discussed.

A great deal of emphasis has been placed, in both this dissertation and its preceding project, on matters of scholarly practice – the possible approaches to a study of Wicca; definitions; demarcating terminology; methodology; the reflexivity of the researcher; the reactivity of the practitioners and wider society; and the debates within academia. This preoccupation with such issues seems to be at odds with the nature of the Mystery religion itself, as has already been touched upon in previous chapters. However, it may be argued that the application of academic inquiry might hold the key to the origins of Wicca, as will be proposed after a summary of the main points of this dissertation.

### **Recapulation**

It has been argued that it is impossible to approach effectively a study of a Mystery religion without a personal understanding of what is meant by the Mysteries. However, these are highly subjective and therefore are difficult to quantify or define, while their spiritual nature render them difficult to explain. The obvious method by which a researcher can gain this personal understanding is to participate in an attempt to experience their own subjective Mystery. This is problematic in terms of accepted

academic methodology insofar as it involves the researcher ‘going native’, which implies a loss of objectivity.

The only existing accepted model of research that addresses this requirement for participatory understanding is Phenomenology. Phenomenology was developed within the religious studies discipline and adopts an observer-participant stance, which seeks to create a ‘bridge of understanding’ between practitioners and non-practitioners. However, participating in rites as an observer will not inform about the Mysteries. Ronald Hutton has argued the case for a fully participatory research methodology<sup>184</sup>, but this is still under development in scholarly circles, as the study of Wicca is still very much a pioneering strand of social and religious history.

The issue of the inadequacies of individual methodologies have dogged the debates concerning the origins of Wicca thus far, particularly in the key ‘survival’ debate. Cohn’s major criticism of Murray focused upon her methodology; yet Cohn’s own approach may be flawed, as may that of his intellectual successor, Kelly.

There is no consensus on the criteria for what constitutes Wicca; therefore researchers have tended to devise their own criteria and used that as a benchmark to determine the presence or absence of pre-Gardnerian Wicca.

As Wicca is an ever-evolving Mystery religion, with little dogma and an inherent encouragement towards practitioners to adapt it to suit themselves (if solitary) or their coven, then the nature of Wicca itself changes from person to person. The scope and scale of possible inclusions into Wiccan practice render it impossible to define concisely. Each definition will also be subjective.

The debates thus far have not adequately proved the cases for either the ‘survival’, ‘revival’ or the ‘invention’ perspectives; and much clarifying research has not been undertaken.

These challenges have been present for all researchers into Wicca, regardless of discipline or era, though the significance of each may vary. There is no reason to conclude that these challenges were

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<sup>184</sup> R Hutton, *Witches, Druids and King Arthur*, pp 288-291

not also manifest for the earliest research which can be unarguably demonstrated to be about Wicca – that of Gerald Gardner.

### **The Origins of Wicca – A Hypothesis**

Gerald Gardner is more often regarded as a primary source of information, rather than an academic, which is how he viewed himself. The possible scenarios under debate have so far focused upon the central issue of whether he founded Wicca, with or without collaboration, or if his claims of discovering an extant Wiccan coven could be verified. However, it may be that both sides of the debate are simultaneously true, if it could be supposed that Gardner lacked skill at academic inquiry and consequently led the witches into a conviction that they were the modern representatives of the witch-cult, as described by Margaret Murray. They might then have applied his criteria to themselves in such a way that it developed into the evidence he needed to convince himself that his suspicions, that they were the surviving witch-cult, were correct.

This hypothetical scenario suggests that Wicca came together, as a distinct religion separated from its parental roots, between 1939 and 1954, when Gardner and the witches were collaborating as researcher and source interviewees, as well as initiated and initiators. But it did not materialize out of thin air. There must have been an adequate number of the elements of Wicca already in existence, amongst the group, to attract Gardner's original interest in them and to pique his curiosity as to whether they were the witch-cult.

### **Was Gardner an Academic?**

Murray's foreword to *Witchcraft Today* addresses its author as Dr Gardner;<sup>185</sup> ten years later, a newspaper article reporting upon his will also names him, Dr Gerald Gardner.<sup>186</sup> However, there is reasonable doubt that Gardner had achieved his doctorate. His biography, *Gerald Gardner: Witch*, reveals that he was self-taught, as he did not attend school nor did he appear to have received home schooling.

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<sup>185</sup> M Murray, 'Introduction', in G Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, p 15

<sup>186</sup> P Heselton, *Gerald Gardner: Witchcraft Revival*, p 81

‘For the self-taught, learning assumes its proper value, measured in the sweat of effort and self-discipline. Gardner made himself a scholar, perhaps he learned thus early the handicap of ignorance. He became a scholar, an expert, a novelist, perhaps because he learnt thus early the immense importance of the printed word.’<sup>187</sup>

The biography charts his life until 1960, which is six years after he is first referred to as Dr Gardner in print, but does not account for that doctorate. Doreen Valiente was told by Gardner that there had been two honorary doctorates, from two different universities, but when she contacted both universities, neither had awarded him this title and one of them, the University of Singapore, had not even been in existence while Gardner had been living in the Far East.<sup>188</sup> It seems reasonable to conclude that Gardner did not possess a doctorate.

So why did he lie to Valiente, Murray and others? There is scope on this issue for a psychological study, but the unqualified impression is that it was an example of Gardner’s naivety regarding the appropriate use of academic titles. For example, in *Witchcraft Today*, he states that ‘I am an anthropologist’;<sup>189</sup> his biographer, based on information provided solely by Gardner, wrote,

‘Now, with time on his hands to think and read and study, he started to fit together what he had learned of the traditions of the Malays and the Saki, and to take an interest in the history of the land he was travelling through. He began to break his journeys in order to examine the sites of the ancient cities of these people... more and more the folklorist archaeologist in him began to take over... when he left in 1936 to go into retirement in England, he could think of himself primarily as an archaeologist forced to leave the scene of his researches; the boy who had once had to teach himself to read had become a scholar.’<sup>190</sup>

In short, Gardner appeared to assume that visiting ancient cities made him an archaeologist; and studying human beings rendered him an anthropologist. It is an interesting issue – at what point

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<sup>187</sup> JL Bracelin, ‘*Gerald Gardner: Witch*,’ p 19

<sup>188</sup> D Valiente, ‘*Witchcraft for Tomorrow*’, pp 13-22

<sup>189</sup> G Gardner, ‘*Witchcraft Today*’, p 18

<sup>190</sup> JL Bracelin, ‘*Gerald Gardner: Witch*’, p 65

should it be permissible for a person to describe himself or herself thus? Is a child with a chemistry set automatically a scientist or does that label come only with a doctorate? Though the demarcation is unclear, the labels themselves imply an academic standard of methodology and research. It is intriguing to speculate whether Gardner was aware, at first, that a doctorate was required in order to apply the title 'doctor'. He certainly knew by the time he informed Doreen Valiente that the title had been honorary and had been awarded by two eastern universities, though this proved to be a fabrication.

However, if Gardner was genuinely attempting to mislead the public about his academic accreditations, then it would be expected that his biography would have accounted for them. Instead he left no time unaccounted for when he could have been studying and does not mention the honorary degrees at all.

Yet he must have appeared scholarly to those whom he encountered. James Laver, once the Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the Victoria and Albert Museum, wrote a foreword to *Gerald Gardner: Witch*, in which he described the visitors who would be quickly filed under 'lunatics', yet he was unable to do so with Gardner.

'(Gardner's manner) convinced me that I was in the presence of a man of a scientific and scholarly mind: a learned man, moreover, who had written the standard work on the Malayan kris, and was an anthropologist and archaeologist of distinction.'<sup>191</sup>

Margaret Murray also knew him for many years, yet was still calling him Dr Gardner in 1954. It seems reasonable to assume that he certainly gave the impression of an academic background, which he believed in himself. There is also no reason to presume that he was not an intelligent man; the doubt is simply in whether he was adequately schooled in an academic standard of methodology and if he was not, what implication that may have had when he conducted his interviews with the witches.

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<sup>191</sup> J Laver, 'Foreword', in JL Bracelin, *Gerald Gardner: Witch*, p 7

### **Gardner's Approach**

A substantial proportion of this dissertation has been devoted to the difficulties inherent in defining Wicca and the requirement, therefore, for each researcher to establish a personal benchmark against which to interrogate the evidence in order to prove or disprove the presence of Wicca. Gardner approached his anthropological study of the witches already with set ideas of his own, which he outlined in *The Meaning of Witchcraft* as formed around an interest in Murray's 'survival' hypothesis; though 'there was not the slightest evidence that the witches had ever been organized into covens', even in the works of Charles Leland.<sup>192</sup> Gardner approached the study of the witches already believing that their history dated from the Stone Age according to the Murray model;<sup>193</sup> and that the benchmark, against which their claim to be witches could be judged as genuine, lay in the fact of their organization, on the basis that solitary witches were impostors.<sup>194</sup> Though Murray did not state that the non-organization of witches negated their status as such, her whole hypothesis did rest on the fact of their organization.

What does appear to be in evidence here is that Gardner's criteria were initially based upon Murray's work. Once he had established that the New Forest witches were genuine by the fact of their organization, then Murray's ideas continue to constitute the lynchpins of his investigation. Gardner's lack of skill as an academic interviewer is also apparent on this issue. There are frequent occasions when he blatantly interpreted the information provided by the witches along Murrayite lines or attempted to steer it back, if it deviated. For example, his statement that, 'there is a very widespread belief in men turning into animals, and the witch's explanation may not be the true one, but it is the only one they know of',<sup>195</sup> followed his question about the Murray explanation for legendary shape-shifting, where the witches' explanation not only did not concur, but was given only after the question itself had been treated as a joke. Heselton also noted this aspect of Gardner's methodology, concluding that,

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<sup>192</sup> G Gardner, '*The Meaning of Witchcraft*', p 8

<sup>193</sup> G Gardner, '*Witchcraft Today*', p 95

<sup>194</sup> G Gardner, '*The Meaning of Witchcraft*', p 8

<sup>195</sup> G Gardner, '*Witchcraft Today*', p 165

‘It... shows how Gardner mixed a lot of Murray’s ideas in with what the witches told him. It was almost as if he had definite ideas of how witchcraft was in the past, and if the witches failed to confirm them, then it was they who were, if not exactly at fault, then certainly possessing gaps in their collective memory.’<sup>196</sup>

The impression given is that Gardner was not prepared to dismiss a theory developed by Murray, even when his interviewees were dismissing it through personal experience. It also demonstrates that when challenged, his interviewees would attempt to align their own practices with those elements which Gardner was insistent should be present. The third most striking point is that the witches did not always concur with Murray, at least initially, which suggests that their Wicca was not based upon Murray’s research.

## **Conclusion**

A lot more research is required before any historian can conclusively pinpoint the origins of Wicca, as even the most likely category of debates – the ‘revival’ perspective – cannot be proved without indisputable evidence that Gardner’s initiation into a group of organized witches took place.

However it is intriguing to speculate that the emergence of Wicca, as a distinct form of modern witchcraft, occurred as a result of leading questions asked by an intelligent but unschooled amateur academic. If, even today, it is impossible to define Wicca, then it can theoretically be uncovered anywhere, depending upon the perception of the researcher. Gardner needed only to discern witchcraft and organization together in order to be convinced that he had found a surviving witch-cult in the Murrayite model. His personality and supposed credentials as an academic presumably persuaded the witches to align their practice to his criteria, even if this was only as a compromise or an affirmation of ignorance which could be therefore reinterpreted as gaps in their knowledge. Gardner himself, as publicist and spokesperson, could finally add his own speculation, which pressed the public form of Wicca even closer to the Murray model.

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<sup>196</sup> P Heselton, *‘Wiccan Roots: Gerald Gardner and the Modern Witchcraft Revival’*, p 282

In this hypothesis, the main question for future research emerges as – how much of the original Wicca survived Gardner’s academia and what form did it take? There is not currently enough evidence for a surviving strand of witchcraft, therefore modern Wicca cannot be unproblematically referred to the original Wicca in order to prove its origins. It may simply be that the fundamental elements of a witchcraft tradition had survived for centuries without the defined boundaries of a structured religion. The witches had organized themselves and their possible membership incorporated a lot of knowledge and experience of Theosophy, Co-Masonry, Freemasonry and other such societies, but their actual practice and dogma appear to have been mutable. Gardner’s difficulty in demarcating the Wicca he discovered is echoed throughout his books, ‘witchcraft today is largely a case of ‘make do’,<sup>197</sup> ‘everyone is apt to alter things slightly, modernizing the language and making other changes,’<sup>198</sup> and ‘exactly what the present-day witch believes I find hard to say’.<sup>199</sup> It does sound very like the Wicca of today, non-definable in its subjectivity, changing from practitioner to practitioner as befits a Mystery Religion, but equally subject to all the same problems experienced by modern academics in their attempt to grasp it within the boundaries of existing and acceptable methodology. It appears vital that, before another academic can search for the origins of Wicca, a standard definition must be developed and applied across academia. Otherwise conclusions concerning its historical existence will always be solely based upon how well the known facts measure against the criteria devised by each seeker; an unsatisfactory approach which, ironically, may be precisely where Wicca’s true origins lie.

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<sup>197</sup> G Gardner, ‘*Witchcraft Today*’, p 148

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid*, p 59

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid*, p 44

## **Appendices**

### **Chronology of the Existing Research**

### **Suggestions for Future Academic Research**

### **Appendix One: Chronology of the Existing Research**

This appendix was originally created as part of my own research notes for this dissertation. It was a reaction to the fact that nothing like this appeared elsewhere in print, yet proved invaluable during both the research and writing processes. It is included in the hope that it may prove to be equally helpful to the as a chronological reference for the reader and to future researchers.

NB This list is not exhaustive, as it excludes those sources that add nothing new to the knowledge base. They are listed in the order in which they were first published and the arguments or evidence provided will be interrogated in the next chapter.

#### **Preparing the Ground:**

- In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Charles G Leland claimed to have made the acquaintance of a witch in Tuscany, who presented him with a manuscript detailing the beliefs and practices of her Tradition. It was written in her handwriting and has never been independently verified, but became a source of inspiration for both Gerald Gardner and Doreen Valiente in their construction of Wiccan rites.<sup>200</sup>
- Margaret Murray made the case, in an anthropological study, for the survival of witchcraft as a pre-Christian Pagan religion into the Middle Ages. Her sources were mainly the judicial records of British witch trials, which were interrogated to provide clues to the supposed underlying religious practice.<sup>201</sup>
- Margaret Murray furthered her previous research into the witch-cult, interpreting the patterns of belief, suggested by evidence regarding rites and ceremonies, into her conclusion that there had been a series of Divine Kings. These ‘priest-kings’, who may have included Joan of Arc and William Rufus, had been ritually sacrificed.<sup>202</sup> Her hypothesis concerning the latter was that ‘the spirit of God (had taken) up its abode in a human being, usually the king, who thereby (became) the giver of fertility to all his kingdom. When the divine man begins to show signs of

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<sup>200</sup> C G Leland, *Aradia: Gospel of the Witches*

<sup>201</sup> M Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*

<sup>202</sup> M Murray, *The God of the Witches*

age he is put to death lest the spirit of God should also grow old and weaken like its human container,' thus adversely affecting the fertility of the land.<sup>203</sup>

### 1950s:

- Pennethorne Hughes' study of witchcraft was in the Murrayite vein, viewing witches as practicing a surviving, pre-Christian religion, who should be remembered sympathetically. It is included in this list because it was the book to which Gardner responded with *Witchcraft Today*, quoting extensively from it and challenging Hughes's assertion that witchcraft, as an organized religion, no longer existed in the British Isles.<sup>204</sup>
- Gerald Gardner revealed the existence of the Wica, practitioners of a Pagan witchcraft religion, in a handful of British localities, with a primary focus upon the New Forest area. Written as an anthropological study, Gardner's authority derives from his own initiatory adherence to the religion. Constrained by an oath of secrecy and the ignorance, or unwillingness to impart certain information, of the witches, he attempted to contextualize Wica within history and contemporary society through external sources.<sup>205</sup>
- Gerald Gardner expanded and developed the main themes of his earlier book, *Witchcraft Today*, arriving at many of the same conclusions, but with a much greater range of supporting evidence.<sup>206</sup>

### 1960s:

- JL Bracelin's biography of Gerald Gardner used his subject as his only source; Gardner also proofread it before it went to print. For these reasons it could be considered a ghostwritten autobiography and provides information about his position in 1960, as well as the official detailing of his life.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> M Murray, *The God of the Witches*, p 160

<sup>204</sup> P Hughes, *Witchcraft*

<sup>205</sup> G Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*

<sup>206</sup> G Gardner, *The Meaning of Witchcraft*

<sup>207</sup> JL Bracelin, *Gerald Gardner: Witch*

- Sybil Leek, writing about her New Forest locality, where she had lived since 1939, described sympathetically the witches she had known there, including a retired gentleman who had held ‘a senior post in the police’. Though unstated, it would appear that it was oral evidence which led her to conclude that ‘the cult of witchcraft is again being practised all over England and is certainly to be found in the New Forest. I doubt there has ever actually been a lull in the life of witches.’<sup>208</sup>
- Justine Glass interviewed British witches around the time of Gardner’s death, in 1964, and provided an insight into their practices and beliefs, focusing mainly on the magical or clairvoyant aspects. She provided a distinctly Gardnerian history of witchcraft, developing his account of the persecution of suspected witches into a full-scale war between church and Wiccans. Of particular significance for the historian, she repeats opinions that she has heard concerning Gardner and implied that she has spoken to the older generation of witches, angered by his publicizing the Craft.<sup>209</sup>
- Sybil Leek wrote her *Diary of a Witch* elaborating on her earlier claim that she was Wiccan. She had been born into a Wiccan family in Staffordshire, before moving to the New Forest in 1939, and meeting New Forest Wiccans. She had knowledge of four covens in the area, though stated that they did not ‘interfere’ with each other’s practices, and had joined one named the Horsa Coven, in Burley. Leek also claimed to have written records of Wiccan membership on a global scale, though these were buried somewhere in the forest. Without mentioning Gardner, the few details she provided about the actual practices and beliefs of her coven did correspond with those reported by him.<sup>210</sup>
- June Johns published a biography of Alex Sanders, who claimed to have been initiated into Wicca aged seven years old, by his Welsh grandmother. He accepted a Murrayite history of witchcraft, describing his own family as descending from a ‘long line of Welsh witches’.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> S Leek, ‘A Fool and a Tree’, pp 111-116

<sup>209</sup> J Glass, ‘Witchcraft: The Sixth Sense’

<sup>210</sup> S Leek, ‘Diary of a Witch’

<sup>211</sup> J Johns, ‘King of the Witches: The World of Alex Sanders’

### 1970s:

- Colin Wilson included Wicca into his overview of the occult, in a chapter about witchcraft, werewolves and vampires. He depicted Gardner as a sexual pervert, who had forged the *Book of Shadows*, while Wicca itself appears to be linked with Aleister Crowley and the Golden Dawn, at worst an excuse for sexual orgies and showmanship, while at best a scientific experiment to discover how many of the 'traditional rites' produce demonstrable results.<sup>212</sup>
- Robert Graves, despite getting fundamental details like Gardner's nationality and the location of his initiatory coven wrong, passed on the information that traditional witchcraft had been 'reinterpreted by a group of theosophists before being aligned with' Gardner's own ideas.<sup>213</sup>
- Doreen Valiente produced an encyclopaedia of witchcraft, covering many aspects of Wicca, including its history. Her account of Gardner's meeting with the witches supplied many supplementary pieces of evidence based on her own conversations with him, notably the fact that they had all been Co-Masons, who had followed Mabel Beasant-Scott into the New Forest and subsequently themselves discovered a coven into which they were initiated. She also reveals that his initiator had died before 1954, which freed him to write *Witchcraft Today*; and that the witches had been angry with him for publishing it. Her own study of the rites and traditions led Valiente to conclude that the hereditary lore had definitely been only fragmentary, but Gardner and the witches had supplemented it with Co-Masonry ritual.<sup>214</sup>
- Francis King concluded that Wicca's claim to antiquity was fraudulent, as much of the *Book of Shadows* could be traced to the works of Aleister Crowley, Mathers, Leland and Kipling.<sup>215</sup>
- Norman Cohn's research revisited Murrayite ground and concluded that there had never been a survival of pre-Christian Paganism in the form of a witch-cult.<sup>216</sup> He vitrolically challenged Margaret Murray's 'survival' hypotheses, decrying them as 'sheer fantasy';<sup>217</sup> while proclaiming that the Associate Professor herself had only a 'superficial' grasp of European history, a 'non-existent' grasp of method, either had not read her sources or had not assimilated

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<sup>212</sup> C Wilson, *The Occult*, pp 596-600

<sup>213</sup> R Graves, 'Modern Witchcraft', in P Haining, *The Necromancers*, p 24

<sup>214</sup> D Valiente, *An ABC of Witchcraft*, pp 152-158

<sup>215</sup> F King, *The Western Tradition of Magic*, p 31

<sup>216</sup> N Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt*

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid*, p 119

them, and implying that, at nearly sixty years of age during her research, her 'exaggerated and distorted' ideas had become too firmly set for objectivity.<sup>218</sup>

- Doreen Valiente revealed that she had contacted both universities from which Gardner was supposed to have received his honorary doctorates, neither had, in fact, awarded him this title and one of them, the University of Singapore, had not even been in existence when Gardner was living in the Far East. She proposed the theory that George Pickingill, an East Anglian hereditary witch, had initiated Aleister Crowley around the turn of the century, who, though not remaining long with the Craft, had written part of its ritual before Gardner was initiated into a New Forest Pickingill coven forty years later. Along the way, Valiente also admits to having written or co-written the *Wiccan Book of Shadows*.<sup>219</sup>

### 1980s:

- Jeffrey B Russell investigated the history of witchcraft in Europe, concluding that not only were the theories of Margaret Murray incorrect, but Gerald Gardner had founded Wicca himself. He further speculated that Dorothy Clutterbuck, Gardner's initiator, had never existed.<sup>220</sup>
- Francis King and Isabel Sutherland accepted Cohn's arguments against the survival of a pre-Christian Pagan religion, but also stated that Louis Wilkinson, an occultist, had independently been in contact with the New Forest coven into which Gardner had been initiated. King and Sutherland concluded that it had existed, but its ancient lineage was doubtful. Their main argument was that the Wiccan belief in reincarnation meant that it could not date later than 1875, as there was no association, within the Western Occult Tradition, with reincarnation before that date. They also speculate that Gardner either wrote the *Book of Shadows* himself or paid Aleister Crowley a substantial sum of money to write it for him.<sup>221</sup>
- Doreen Valiente proved the existence of Dorothy Clutterbuck, the witch credited with initiating Gerald Gardner, with documentary evidence including her birth certificate. She was also able to demonstrate that Clutterbuck had lived in the New Forest at the same time as Gardner.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> N Cohn, 'Europe's Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt', p 109

<sup>219</sup> D Valiente, 'Witchcraft for Tomorrow', pp 13-22

<sup>220</sup> JB Russell, 'A History of Witchcraft'

<sup>221</sup> F King and I Sutherland, 'The Rebirth of Magic', pp 198-209

<sup>222</sup> D Valiente, 'The Search for Old Dorothy', in J & S Farrar, 'The Witches' Way', p 283-293

- Vivienne Crowley reappraised the known history of Wicca to date and quoted Lugh, a correspondent to *The Cauldron* magazine, as suggesting that the New Forest coven had been founded by George Pickingill, and revealed that he had experience of the Freemasons and knowledge about 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century magical societies. She also challenged Cohn's arguments against the survival of a pre-Christian witch-cult, on the basis that he had failed to take into account some of the evidence contrary to his views.<sup>223</sup>
- TM Luhrmann published an anthropological study of witches and other magical practitioners in Southern England, which had formed her doctoral thesis in the 1980s. She produced an often unflattering portrait of contemporary practitioners (which created difficulties for later researchers), but reported that she had spoken to senior witches who had known Gardner and were convinced that such personalities as Dorothy Clutterbuck had existed. While Luhrmann concluded that the initiatory group probably had existed, she found no evidence that it pre-dated Murray's books.<sup>224</sup>
- Doreen Valiente provided her own account of Wicca and other witchcraft religions, charting their twentieth-century histories, commenting upon their evolution through the 1950s to the 1980s and contextualizing each important milestone within the witchcraft community and wider society. It was tellingly entitled, 'The Rebirth of Witchcraft', and her narrative made it clear that she viewed Wicca as a revival of an older religion. Valiente held a unique perspective, as she first met Gardner and another witch, Dafo, in 1952,<sup>225</sup> and was initiated by him the following year.<sup>226</sup> Her testimony provided evidence for the existence of the New Forest coven, some of it first-hand anecdotal, but supported by her personal acquaintance with members of it. She matter-of-factly identified which elements she had alone or in collaboration with Gardner introduced into modern Wicca, while also stating her rationale for doing so and the sources, directly or as inspiration, that she drew upon. She attempted to do the same with the other aspects of the religion and its rites; though she had to rely on information gleaned from conversations with others, primarily Gardner himself, or educated conjecture, for anything which pre-dated her involvement. Valiente also addressed the existing arguments in the debate about the origin of Wicca, correcting misconceptions which she knew from her own

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<sup>223</sup> V Crowley, 'Wicca: *The Old Religion in the New Age*', pp 46-49

<sup>224</sup> TM Luhrmann, '*Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*'

<sup>225</sup> D Valiente, '*The Rebirth of Witchcraft*', p 37

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid*, p 40

participation in the events under scrutiny to be false and providing further relevant information where possible. A final important contribution was her description of the other influential personalities, based on knowing each of them for many years, which often provided valuable insights into their roles in the growth of Wicca and other witchcraft religions in this period. Her conclusion was that at least one organized witchcraft religion had existed prior to Gardner's involvement, but he had been instrumental in its public revival, astronomical growth in numbers and its development from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>227</sup>

### 1990s:

- Evan John Jones, an initiate into Traditional Witchcraft (i.e. a tradition claiming a long existence, but separate to Wicca), wrote about his tradition and speculated about its origins along Murrayite lines. Maybe this, or the collaboration with Doreen Valiente – who both edited and provided the foreword – rendered it very similar to Wicca, though a later book, *Roebuck in the Thicket*, demonstrated strong dissimilarities.<sup>228</sup>
- Ronald Hutton surveyed the evidence, much of it archaeological, which provides insights into the pre-Christian religious beliefs within the British Isles. He also reviewed the arguments concerning the survival of aspects of these religions into the Middle Ages.<sup>229</sup>
- Rhiannon Ryall wrote about her own Wicca, into which she was initiated in the 1940s before the religion was publicized by Gardner et al. She had been taught by word of mouth without any written sources and, until her exposure to Wicca, she had not encountered 'such concepts as the Man in Black, the Charge, the Witches' Rune and... the Descent of the Goddess.'<sup>230</sup> She highlighted other differences elsewhere in her book, which included her religion having two degrees of initiation (Wicca has three) and the coven leaders not possessing the High Priest and High Priestess titles which are common throughout Wicca. Otherwise, the description of her pre-Gardnerian witchcraft corresponded very well with post-Gardnerian Wicca, so much so that she refers to her religion as Wicca despite having stated that it was simply called the Craft.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> D Valiente, 'The Rebirth of Witchcraft'

<sup>228</sup> EJ Jones with D Valiente, 'Witchcraft: A Tradition Renewed'

<sup>229</sup> R Hutton, 'The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles: Their Nature and Legacy'

<sup>230</sup> R Ryall, 'West Country Wicca: A Journal of the Old Religion', p 4

<sup>231</sup> R Ryall, 'West Country Wicca: A Journal of the Old Religion'

- Aidan Kelly analysed the various versions of Gerald Gardner's *Book of Shadows* and other papers, locating the source from which each part had been borrowed and, in the process, illuminating the influences upon Gardner and therefore, possibly, the origins of Wicca itself.<sup>232</sup>
- In a speech delivered at the 'Paganism in Contemporary Britain' conference, at the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, in September 1994, and subsequently published in *Paganism Today*,<sup>233</sup> Ronald Hutton suggested a link between the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry, which shared many aspects with Wicca and had its headquarters in the New Forest concurrent with Gardner's meeting with the witches, while also highlighting the number of magical or folk-lore societies of which Gardner was associated between 1936 and 1949. However, he had yet to reach any conclusions, stating that the evidence proposed 'that modern Paganism was neither the descendant of a continuous sectarian witch cult, nor born fully-fledged from the imagination of one man in the 1940s.'<sup>234</sup>
- Ronald Hutton studied the British ritual year, challenging prevalent myths surrounding them and attempting to trace the historical roots of events like May Day and Hallowe'en.<sup>235</sup>
- The methodology of Margaret Murray was reappraised in a more positive light by Caroline Oates and Juliette Wood, contextualizing her work and the influences upon it; also providing transcripts of items from the Murray Collection, 'containing a mixture of handwritten and typed notes, letters and clippings', with which to support their conclusions. Their research also found that Murray did not approve of the Wiccans, regarding them with ridicule.<sup>236</sup>
- Bengt Ankaloo and Stuart Clark edited a collection of three extended essays by Ronald Hutton, Jean La Fontaine and Willem de Blecourt. Of greatest interest, in the current context, was the contribution by Hutton, wherein he identified the historical cultural trends that he concluded, developed into modern Pagan witchcraft.<sup>237</sup>
- Tony Steele interviewed the canal barge 'water witches' and learned that, circa 1945, Gerald Gardner had been initiated into their Hertfordshire coven. As an 'outsider', this event caused division between the Hertfordshire and the Staffordshire branches, but he hypothesized that their teachings helped to develop Gardnerian Wicca. However, upon analysis, Steele

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<sup>232</sup> A Kelly, 'Crafting the Art of Magic: Book 1: A History of Modern Witchcraft 1939-1964'

<sup>233</sup> Re-issued as G Harvey and C Hardman (ed), 'Pagan Pathways', in 2000

<sup>234</sup> R Hutton, 'The Roots of Modern Paganism', in 'Pagan Pathways', pp 3-13

<sup>235</sup> R Hutton, 'The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain'

<sup>236</sup> C Oates and J Wood, 'A Coven of Scholars: Margaret Murray and her Working Methods'

<sup>237</sup> B Ankaloo and S Clark (ed), 'The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe'

concluded that there were no traces of ‘water witchcraft’ in Wicca and therefore he questioned whether Wiccan could be considered ‘real witches’.<sup>238</sup>

- Ronald Hutton produced the ‘first systematic attempt by a professional historian to characterize and account for’<sup>239</sup> modern Pagan witchcraft. It is ‘a’ history rather than the definitive account, though it remains the sole attempt at such a study to date. Its focus is upon the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, exploring each manifestation of magical, metaphysical and occult practices, Pagan beliefs and its development into religious practice, plus a cultural contextualization.<sup>240</sup>
- *Far Out: The Dawning of New Age Britain* was aired as a documentary series on Channel 4 with an accompanying book. As well as interviewing many early Wiccans, it also provided the evidence of two witches who had practiced their Craft before Gardner’s intervention, but whose practices appeared to be similar to Wicca.<sup>241</sup>

## 2000s:

- Mike Howard compiled an anthology detailing the Robert Cochrane Witchcraft Tradition, though most of its chapters were written by Evan John Jones, whom Cochrane had initiated. It detailed a British witchcraft tradition that had always claimed to pre-date Gardner’s Wicca and contained both similarities and differences. While exploring the major question of whether Cochrane was genuine, it does not provide a conclusion either way and therefore its value in assessing Wiccan origins is negligible.<sup>242</sup>
- Philip Heselton collected together, reprinted in a single volume, various primary source materials relating to Gerald Gardner. These included the brochure to his Museum of Witchcraft and Magic and an article, penned by Gardner in 1939, originally printed for the Folk-lore Society.<sup>243</sup>
- Philip Heselton has researched the New Forest community from which Gardner claimed his initiatory coven emerged, and identified possible or probable members of this coven. An

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<sup>238</sup> T Steele, ‘Water Witches’, pp 10-14

<sup>239</sup> R Hutton, ‘Triumph of the Moon’, p vii

<sup>240</sup> R Hutton, ‘Triumph of the Moon’

<sup>241</sup> M Akhtar and S Humphries, ‘Far Out: The Dawning of New Age Britain’ pp 41-67

<sup>242</sup> E J Jones and R Cochrane, M Howard (ed), ‘The Roebuck in the Thicket: An Anthology of the Robert Cochrane Witchcraft Tradition’

<sup>243</sup> P Heselton, ‘Gerald Gardner: Witchcraft Revival’

analysis of the known information about their beliefs and practices has provided a strong foundation upon which Wicca could have been developed or formed, while also supporting Gardner's account of his introduction to the religion.<sup>244</sup>

- Owen Davies provided an historical overview of the 'cunning-folk' – a catch-all term, which he selected from the plethora of names assigned to those who were the unofficial healers, conjurers, wise men and women, witches (reputed or self-proclaimed) and other magical practitioners for their communities.<sup>245</sup>
- Sally Griffyn collected a series of interviews with Wiccan pioneers, which included a full transcript of Doreen Valiente's 1997 speech, before the Pagan Federation, in response to the accusation 'of helping to found a new religion'. It clarified her position, as someone initiated into the Craft in the belief that it had ancient roots; described the personalities of both Gerald Gardner and Robert Cochrane; and ultimately demonstrated that she did not know herself where the roots of Wicca lie, viewing its emergence via Gardner as 'simply an example of the manifestation of an idea whose time had come', whilst discussing the Tradition in times of its longevity.<sup>246</sup>
- Philip Heselton provided an in-depth, kaleidoscopic study of all the people, societies and other sources with whom Gerald Gardner associated with, or could have been otherwise influenced by, in the years preceding the publishing of Wicca. He also uncovered a *Book of Shadows*, which pre-dated those studied by Aidan Kelly, and therefore challenges many of his conclusions, while also making a strong case for the pre-Gardnerian creation of Wicca in the 1920s.<sup>247</sup>
- Ronald Hutton wrote a series of essays, collected into one volume, focusing upon differing themes around Pagan history and its study. Of particular interest is *Living With Witchcraft*, which discusses the challenges inherent to the academic in this field.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> P Heselton, 'Wiccan Roots: Gerald Gardner and the Modern Witchcraft Revival'

<sup>245</sup> O Davies, 'Cunning-Folk: Popular Magic in English History'

<sup>246</sup> S Griffyn, 'The Wiccan Wisdomkeepers', pp 30-39

<sup>247</sup> P Heselton, 'Gerald Gardner and the Cauldron of Inspiration: An Investigation into the Sources of Gardnerian Witchcraft'

<sup>248</sup> R Hutton, 'Witches, Druids and King Arthur'

### **Appendix Two: Suggestions for Future Academic Research**

- A 'family tree' – collating a list of the myriad of metaphysical, occult or Pagan societies meeting at the start of the twentieth-century and extensively comparing them to Wicca. Exploring how they interlinked and which societies may be viewed as parenting another. Rationale: A pattern may emerge which links directly into Wicca, thus highlighting its roots; additionally, it would prove or discount the possibility that it emerged as a ritualistic element of the Theosophical Society, or similar.
- A simple chronology of publications, literature, trends, significant events etc in Wicca. Rationale: The picture is currently so large, and sources so scattered, that it is difficult to determine influences at a particular point in time.
- Reliable statistical data, presenting historiographical, demographical/geographical and sociological information. Rationale: A demonstration of where, when and amongst which communities Wicca materialized and grew might be able to be manipulated retrospectively to illuminate the Gardnerian and pre-Gardnerian timescales.
- A longitudinal audit of predominant beliefs and practices. It is possible that a strong personality/public statement by a prominent Wiccan etc may cause practitioners to claim that they always held the same views/had the same knowledge. This is perfectly understandable in the context that each practitioner is automatically a priest/priestess and may go through periods of acting as a spiritual leader for initiates and/or becoming a representative of witchcraft, Paganism or Wicca for the wider community. Without the requisite training – in psychiatry, social work, public speaking, general theology and the other myriad of skill expectations often placed on these people – there is pressure to appear infinitely infallible or to present a united front against external challenge. Rationale: Identifying the source of views or beliefs applied retrospectively would help clarify a) what the major influences have been on the development of the religion; b) what practitioners could have been expected to have had awareness of at any given period in history; and c) what was likely known by, at least, the early Gardnerians.
- An investigation into the Wiccan diaspora. Who carried Wicca into the global community? Did Wicca already exist in those countries, or something like it? When did the diaspora occur? Rationale: Wicca emerging in another country in the pre-Gardnerian period would provide

significant evidence of its existence prior to Gardner's initiation. Similarly, its absence until after the Gardnerian years, carried solely by his initiates, would imply the opposite.

- Re-investigating and/or challenging the seminal studies. It would be interesting if an investigation was held into the beliefs of the Tuscany witches, which would inform the arguments concerning Charles Leland's *Aradia*. Rationale: As this book is generally considered influential in the development of Wicca, it would be illuminating to see how far the claims within it can be verified.
- A scholarly investigation into the existence of witchcraft religions which have not been influenced by Gardner Gardner and other Wiccans. This may begin with those described by Rhiannon Ryall and Robert Cochrane, with the former being prioritized, as Ms Ryall is living and therefore could contribute her oral testimony and answer direct questions. Rationale: The validity of these religions would inform the debate into the nature and extent of Gardner's involvement in Wicca. If they can be proved to exist prior to Gardner's return to Britain, then they strengthen the argument that he did not invent an Old Religion, whilst also providing comparative witchcraft religions against which his influence upon modern Wicca can be determined.

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Is British Wicca a Survival, Revival, or Reconstruction of an 'ancient' religion? Under the usual classification is Wicca a religion at all? Examine the evidence interrogated by Jo Harrington, and see what you think! Easy to read, and not at all 'stuffy'!! ISBN: 1-900433-31-1 | Card Cover booklet | Published by Flying Witch Publications. Purchase Jo's dissertation at Witchcraft Ltd in Glastonbury. © Jo Harrington MA BA (Hons) | Mab-Morrigan Art © Amy L. Rawson | Webdesign by Hilde Bakering. Originated from the personal experience of myself as a Tate Encounters™ coresearcher, this study was grounded in the light of a few vague and initially unconnected ~subjective~™ considerations and enquiries about the contradictory [~democratic~™ and ~oppressive~™] dynamics of the museum. Aiming not to betray the personal essence of this piece, ~reflexivity~™ was embraced as the methodological experiential activity to generate grounded analysis on the subject of research. This study acknowledges art museums~™ attempts to mediate between their intrinsic contradictory dynamics, reshape their relations