

# *The Cauldron*

## A SEEKER'S JOURNEY

Issue NO. 135 February 2010

Michael Howard's magical autobiography

Over the years friends and acquaintances have suggested that I write my memoirs or an autobiography. False modesty has always prevented me doing this up to now. Plus the fact that I did not want to upset people who are still alive or tarnish the reputation of those who have passed on. However I have now decided to write something for TC on my beginnings on the Path, my journey so far and some of the influential people I have been privileged to have met and known, and sometimes called friends, along the way. I hope you will find it of interest and not too self-indulgent or boring.

As a young teenager I developed an interest in the supernatural and the occult, if only in a fictional form. I was an avid reader of the 'black magic' thrillers of Dennis Wheatley, the ghost stories of M.R. James and Algernon Blackwood (whom I later discovered had been a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn), the adventure stories of C.S. Lewis, H. Rider Haggard and Edgar Rice Burroughs. the 'Fu Manchu' novels of Sax Rohmer (another occultist with links to the GD). Arthur Machen (ditto), Robert E. Howard's, sword & sorcery' stories, and the horror tales of H.P. Lovecraft.

After a near death experience during an emergency operation when I was fourteen I became more seriously interested in spiritual and esoteric matters and began studying books on Tibetan Buddhism. Some of my first reading in this respect was, in hindsight, quite laughable (and fictional) books by 'Lobsang Rampa', or 'Rampant Lobster' as I nicknamed him. It later turned out he was a plumber and decorator called Cyril Hoskins who had either fallen off a ladder one day or out of a tree while photographing an owl! When he regained consciousness he discovered that he was now possessed by the spirit of a Tibetan lama.

In my state of juvenile ignorance at the time I thought it all sounded fairly reasonable and it was exciting stuff. I really wanted to believe there were secret caves in Tibet inhabited by 200-year-old lamas and full of Atlantean flying machines and the Akashic Records. I had seen and loved the classic film *Lost Horizon* and thought Shangri-la or Shambala actually existed and Mr Hoskins had found it. Despite their often ludicrous content and appalling standard of writing, and the fact he claimed one of them had been dictated to him by his talking cat, Mr Rampa's books became global bestsellers. This was probably because they were easily available in cheap paperback editions and gullible teenagers like me could afford to buy them out of their pocket money. Also, as I was to discover later when I gained some degree of discrimination and judgement, people will believe absolutely anything.

In March 1963 I read a report in the old *Daily Sketch* newspaper of a so-called 'Black Magic Rite' at a ruined church near the village of Clophill in Bedfordshire. The skeleton of a young woman, an eighteenth-century apothecary assistant, had been removed from a grave, the skull placed on an iron spike, and a black cockerel sacrificed. This sparked my curiosity as I realised that magic (albeit of a sinister and dark type, as the newspapers had incorrectly described it at the time as a 'Black Mass') was still being practised for real. It was many years later that I found out that the Clophill incident had apparently been a necromantic rite. It was performed by a local coven of traditional witches and there may have been some connection with the famous witch Robert Cochrane. He had certainly heard about it and knew what had happened during its performance.

Shortly after this I was watching a religious programme on television one Sunday evening and there was

an interview with an eccentric elderly man with a shock of white hair and matching goatee beard. He was introduced as a practising witch, the High Priest of several covens and the curator of a witchcraft museum on the Isle of Man. I seem to remember he was also described as being Scottish, which was not strictly true. However I was very impressed by his spirited defence of witchcraft in the face of a verbal attack by a clergyman who was also on the programme for 'editorial balance'. This eccentric character was, of course, Gerald Gardner and seeing him on television was my first active proof that witches still existed in the modern world.

My first encounter with real witchcraft in this life occurred during the early 1960s when I was a student at an agricultural college in Somerset. At the college we had three days a week of lectures and three days of what today we would call 'work experience' on a local farm. We had Sundays off, that is after the compulsory church service in the morning. My work placement was on a smallholding between Castle Cary and Wincanton run by two elderly spinster sisters. I became fascinated by the local folklore recounted to me by the old dairy man who worked part-time on the farm.

He told me the spinsters still superstitiously nailed rowan twigs above the barn and cowshed doors on May Eve and Hallowe'en to ward off the faeries and the 'black witches' (sic). Naturally I asked him if he believed in witchcraft. He replied in the affirmative and seemed surprised I would even ask such a silly question. However he made allowances for me as I was young and a 'townie'. He told me about solitary female witches he knew living on the Somerset-Dorset border who could curse or cure. There was also, he said, a local 'wise man' (sic) who was allegedly capable of killing somebody by just looking at them. This was known as 'owl blinking' or 'owl blasting' and referred to the casting of the Evil Eye.

The agricultural college itself was situated in an ancient manor house reputedly haunted by a spectral butler and a mysterious 'White Lady.' The house was adjacent to the village church and overlooked its graveyard. The ghost of a woman dressed in a long white dress was supposed to emerge from the nearby woods, gliding a couple of feet above the ground, and travel in a straight line through its surrounding wall into the churchyard. She was also sometimes seen inside the manor house and 'walked' the upstairs corridors where the bedrooms were situated.

On one famous occasion a student woke us all up during the night with his screaming. When he finally calmed down, the terrified boy claimed he had woken up to find the 'White Lady' standing at the end of his bed. She was looking down at him with a malevolent look on her thin pale face. He left the college shortly after this incident, as he was too scared to stay. Unfortunately I never met the spectre, but the upstairs of the house she was supposed to haunt had a very spooky atmosphere. It was strangely dark and chilly even on the sunniest of summer days. At the time I believed the 'White Lady' was a previous human occupant of the house. It was only much later I learnt about the wights or land spirits, or even the goddess of the land or the Queen of Elfame, who can take this archetypal form.

The residents of the village where the manor house was located told stories of how the ghosts of King Arthur and his knights could be seen riding through the leafy lanes on Midsummer's Eve. The ancient warriors carried flaming spears or lances and their bodies and horses shone with an unearthly light. Apparently they rode forth from a nearby Iron Age hillfort that local folklore stated was the site of the once and future kings Camelot. The spectral band then travelled north to Glastonbury Tor along a former prehistoric track-way known locally as Arthur's Way. Later when I learnt about ley-lines it seemed obvious that the cross country route taken by the king and his warriors was an ancient 'spirit path'.

At the time I was at the agricultural college a team of archaeologists were excavating the hill-fort for a BBC programme. From their extensive finds they became convinced that the site had been the home of a high status Iron Age chieftain, although it could not be proved for sure it was Arthur. These stories of the once and future king and his version of the Wild Hunt fired my imagination and awoke some strange far memories. It was a magical place and I was sorry to have to finally leave it.

After graduating from the college, I obtained employment for a brief time on a farm in Gloucestershire. It

was hard work with long hours. However, on my one day off every week, I either walked in the surrounding countryside observing the local fauna and flora or caught the weekly bus into Cheltenham or Gloucester to sample the 'bright lights'. In a side street in sedate Cheltenham I was lucky enough to find an antiquarian bookshop with a goodly stock of second-hand occult books at very reasonable prices. They needed to be as I was barely surviving on a farm worker's meagre wages of a few pounds a week.

My first serious non-fiction reading on witchcraft and magic was as diverse as John Symond's never bettered biography of Aleister Crowley *The Great Beast*, Madame Helena Blavatsky's esoteric and obtuse two volumes of *The Secret Doctrine* and her *Isis Unveiled*, the whole thirteen volumes of the first edition of Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, (which several years later I sold for a pittance to pay an electricity bill), Dr Margaret Murray's speculative *The Witch Cult in Western Europe*, Montague Summer's sensationalist *Witchcraft and Black Magic*, Aleister Crowley's *Magick in Theory and Practice*, Robert Graves's seminal and inspiring poetic classic *The White Goddess*, and first editions of Dion Fortune's fabulous occult novels, *The Sea Priestess* and *Moon Magic*. The last two books had a profound effect on me and it was some years before their full significance became clear. All in all it was a heady brew for a working-class lad whose only education had been at a secondary modern school. However it provided an excellent grounding for anyone taking their first tentative steps on the occult path.

While working on the farm I had the 'luck' to meet another person who had knowledge of real witchcraft. This time it was on a practical level. He was a regular visitor to the farm for the mundane reason of mending fences and hedge-laying. He was not only an experienced old countryman, but also an actual practitioner of the Arte – a traditional witch or 'cunning man' of the 'old school'. He seemed to recognise something in me and that I was interested in matters arcane. From him I learnt that the real 'Old Craft', traditional-type witchcraft with a historical basis, was still being practised in the English countryside, although he was reluctant to talk too much about it. He did however hint that he knew of several operative covines and individual practitioners in the Cotswold area of the UK, who were not of the modern Wicca type associated with Gerald Gardner and in fact pre-dated him.

Unfortunately shortly afterwards my mother became terminally ill and I decided to leave and return to Middlesex. I took a job in Stanmore as a gardener in a large public park that had once been the estate of the Duke of Buckingham. His adjacent mansion was now a private school for wealthy young ladies. I later decided to give this up and take up office work. It was warmer and drier indoors and paid better! Over the years before I retired this led to managerial and executive positions in private companies, local government and the civil service including H.M. Customs.

In 1964 I had joined the Witchcraft: Research Association run by the pseudonymous 'John Math'. In reality he was a son of the Earl of Gainsborough, had trained for the Roman Catholic priesthood as a young man, and was a captain in the Royal Marine Commandos during the Second World War. The innovative idea behind the formation of the WRA was to bring together witches from various traditions and research survivals of witchcraft. Unfortunately, due to the bad tempered arguments between prominent Gardnerians, such as Patricia and Arnold Crowther, and 'traditional witches' like 'Robert Cochrane' and his friend 'Taliesin' in the pages of the WRA's newsletter *Pentagram*, the organisation finally had to disband. John Math had lost interest in the project anyway and famously told me that there was not enough material available to sustain a witchcraft magazine for any length of time.

I am however grateful to the WRA for first introducing me to the writings of Robert Cochrane and the teachings of his tradition, which he described in the articles he wrote for its newsletter, and these have had a lasting influence on my progress through the Craft. Although RC claimed he was a 'hereditary witch' from a long-standing family tradition, I was never totally convinced even at the time, but that does not mean, that he was not genuine, made it all up or that he had not had some contact as a young man with genuine old-style witchcraft. In fact the available evidence suggests that he did.

In the late summer of 1967 my life took a sudden and dramatic turn that was to change it and my world-

view and spiritual outlook completely. I wrote a letter to 'Madeline Montalban' ('Dolores North' or Sylvia Royals) after reading one of her articles in the popular astrological *Prediction* magazine. She was a magus, astrologer and taromancer and had been writing the monthly horoscopes and articles on astrology, folklore and magic for the magazine since the mid-1950s. Madeline did not usually answer correspondence or meet people, but for some reason she made an exception in my case. She replied to my letter and invited me to visit her home in the West End of London. At the time she lived in a second floor apartment at Queen Alexandria's Mansions, 3 Grape Street, St Giles Circus WC1, just behind the Shaftesbury Theatre, which was then showing the famous hippy musical *Hair*. It was the original 'summer of love' and the streets of London were crowded with young people with flowers in their hair and wearing kaftans and beads. The Age of Aquarius had arrived!

From the outside the mansions looked like a gothic fairy-tale castle and it was the ideal habitat for a modern sorceress. The flat was full of antique furniture and occult curios and an amazing collection of rare books, including first editions of Agrippa's *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy*, grimoires like the *Key of Solomon*, Francis Barrett's *The Magus*, Arthur Edward Waite's *The Book of Ceremonial Magic* and Meric Causabon's book on the Enochian magical system of Dr John Dee, which Madeline kept under her bed because it was too large to go in a bookcase! Unfortunately she seemed to be totally unaware of the existence of photocopiers, primitive though they were at the time, or the value of her book collection. She would frequently raid her occult library for pictures to illustrate her articles. Many was the time I had to literally grab the scissors out of Madeline's hand before she desecrated yet another priceless volume.

On our first meeting Madeline obviously recognised me as a kindred spirit. We instantly became friends, despite the great difference in our ages and our social backgrounds, as well as teacher and pupil. Madeline confided in me that when we had met she had seen the 'Mark of Cain' in my aura. At the time this meant nothing to me. It was only many years later that I understood what it really signified. She also claimed that my 'fetch' or spirit double had visited the flat before we met. This explained the look of surprise on her face when I stepped out of the lift and she greeted me at the doorway of her flat. Before we met she had believed the manifestation was one of the many spirits that haunted her home. She later wrote about my astral visitation in an article for *Prediction*.

Madeline was firmly convinced we had known each other in a past life or lives. She invited me to become a student of her Luciferian magical group the Order of the Morning Star (Ordo Stella Matutina) and told me she believed all its members had known each other in the past when they were initiates of the Babylonian and Ancient Egyptian priesthood. To the consternation of my parents, who did not approve of my interest in the occult anyway or understand why I was regularly visiting an elderly lady in London, I spent nearly every weekend and my spare time for the next two years studying with Madeline. In fact my conflict with my parents over my visits eventually led to me leaving home. During that teaching period she taught me about the magical uses of astrology and the Tarot, Egyptian, Babylonian and Chaldean mythology, occult correspondences, medieval magic from the grimoire tradition and angelic lore. I was also introduced to the secret teachings of the Watchers or fallen angels led by Lucifer the Lightbearer, who she called Lord Lumiel from a Cabbalistic source. In fact it was my time with the OMS that has led some ignorant people on the Internet to label me as a 'black magician' and 'Satanist'!

Madeline claimed she had experienced a vision and direct telepathic contact with the rebel angel in the 1950s. As a result, at Lord Lumiel's command, she wrote a correspondence course on angelic magic with her then lover and magical partner 'Nicholas Heron', who was a talented craftsman and manufacturer of talismans. She had also known and worked magically with many famous occultists including Aleister Crowley, Gerald Gardner and Kenneth Grant. Before the second world war she was a journalist with the Reuters Press Agency and the *Daily Express* and had first met Crowley when the newspaper sent her to interview him. She had visited his lodgings in Jermyn Street WI and the door was opened by his latest 'Scarlet Woman' or seer-priestess. She informed Madeline the Great Beast was upstairs in the bath having

an asthma attack. As she had an aged relative who suffered from the same condition, Madeline was able to treat Crowley and he was forever grateful. The Great Beast took her to the fashionable Cafe Royal in Regents Street for lunch, but when it came time to pay the bill Crowley confessed he had no money and Madeline had to do the honours. Presumably he fancied a free lunch on the newspaper who in the past had blackened his name as the so-called 'Wickedest Man in the World' – hardly when compared with his contemporaries Stalin and Hitler!

After Madeline died in 1982 I heard that one of her students had found a complete set of ceremonial robes belonging to Crowley's magical order the A. A. or Argentium Astrum (known exoterically as The Order of the Silver Star) in a large wooden box in her apartment. Presumably she had been a member of the Order before the war. Madeline actually told me that Crowley regarded her as his 'Moonchild' and that he prized her as his seer. Because of that he was always "a perfect gentleman" and never made any sexual advances towards her. However there was no truth in the claim Madeline often made of living at Crowley's Abbey of Thelerna in Sicily in the early 1920s. She would have been far too young.

After the second world war broke out in 1939, Madeline Montalban joined the Royal Navy as a Wren. In that position she served with the Admiral of the Fleet, Lord Louis Mountbatten, the uncle of Prince Charles, and told me she acted as his personal psychic advisor. It is known that Mountbatten had an interest in the occult and may even have been a member of a famous magical order. Madeline showed me a personally signed photograph of the First Sea Lord in an expensive silver frame. Madeline had many friends in high places including a Grand Duchess of Luxembourg. In fact she actually earned a lucrative living giving expensive Tarot readings to wealthy clients.

During the second world war she seems to have been quite active in the esoteric scene and when Gerald Gardner first met her, he said she was wearing "the uniform of a Royal Navy officer". Another person who knew her well in wartime London has claimed that, uncharacteristically, Madeline adopted the persona of a witch. However, when she was described in a magazine article in the 1970s as the 'Witch of St Giles', she went berserk and threatened to sue and curse the publication because she regarded it as a gross insult!

When Madeline lived in a block of flats on the site of the present Centre Point building in Central London in the late 1940s she worked magically with Gerald Gardner. When the flats were demolished to make way for Centre Point she ritually cursed the building. She always claimed credit for the fact that it was empty for many years. When I met her, she had a poor opinion of Gardner, and indeed modern Wiccans in general, She dismissed him as a fraud and, as she was rather puritanical, a 'dirty old man' and sexual pervert. She told a bizarre story of how during a magical ritual Gardner tried to persuade her to tie him up and tickle his genitals with a feather duster. This evidently was to stimulate the impotent old man enough so he could perform the 'Great Rite' (ritual sex). After that incident she had no respect for him.

Although she despised modern witchcraft, since Madeline's death in 1982 several independent and unconnected sources have informed me that before the war she was associated with the 'Old Craft'. That makes some sense to me as the rituals she did were very simple forms of spellcraft, They reminded me very much of the traditional folk magic practised by the old-time cunning men and wise-women. She totally disliked the theatrical rites of Golden Dawn-type magic and thought a lot of it was just play-acting.

It was through Madeline's patronage and recommendation that I began my long writing career. This was with a short article on the elemental kingdom published in *Prediction* in 1971. I continued to write articles and book reviews for it for over thirty years until its long serving editor and my friend, Jo Logan, retired. Then a new regime took over, dumbing it down into a New Age women's lifestyle magazine and my serious articles no longer fitted the format. I did not want to be associated with it anyway. In 1975 my first book *Candle Burning: Its Occult Significance* was published by Thorsons and since then I have written many more.

During 1968 I went with Madeline on what she called one of her "magical mystery tours". This one was to the West Country and I visited the White Horse at Uffington, Avebury, Stonehenge, Boscastle,

Tintagel and Lands End for the first time. This trip and my time in Somerset left me with a lifelong love of the west of England. When we were in Boscastle we naturally visited the then cobwebbed, dusty and very spooky witchcraft museum, which would be closed down today on Health and Safety grounds. It was run by Cecil Williamson, an ex-tobacco farmer in Africa, ex-film producer, ex-wartime secret agent and a modern cunning man. I got chatting to the elderly couple who managed the museum on Cecil's behalf and lived in the flat above it. They volunteered his address in the Cornish fishing village of Polperro, where he also ran a smuggling museum and on our way to Land's End I called on him. Some years later we corresponded about his stormy relationship with Gerald Gardner, who was his business partner in the Isle of Man witchcraft museum, the origins of modern Wicca, and the old ways of the West Country witches and cunning folk he knew and worked with over the years. That first contact with Cecil led to my rather strange and coincidence ridden relationship with the Boscastle museum over the years since.

In 1969 I was initiated into Gardnerian Wicca by Rosina Bishop. Madeline Montalban was none too pleased at this development She could not understand why I did it and regarded my action as a personal betrayal. Madeline suffered from erratic and sometimes quite violent mood swings. She had quite a temper, not helped by the heavy consumption of cheap Spanish wine, so she was not a person you crossed. When she was in one of famous moods it was best to make you your excuses and leave.

As a result of my Wiccan initiation our relationship hit a stormy period and we went our own ways for several years. Although we did not see much of each other, we stayed in touch. I visited her a few times and remember many late night telephone calls discussing her latest grandiose schemes, none of which got off the ground. These included starting an occult magazine called *The Magus* and running a 'magical boutique' in Harrods selling home-made incense, hand-made personalised talismans and amulets and consecrated candles. She also had plans to move to Paris to start a new magical order or buy a country house in Wales for use as an occult centre and school for young wannabe magicians. J .K. Rowling did not invent Hogwarts!

My Wiccan initiator, Rosina, had a foot in both camps of modern witchcraft. The man who initiated her had been brought in to the Craft by one of Gardner's later priestesses whose witch name was 'Francesca'. While living temporarily in a caravan at Peacehaven in Sussex, Rosina had also known Doreen Valiente and through her met Robert Cochrane. She had also been a leading member of The Regency, run by Cochrane's former Craft colleagues Ronald White and George Winter. She also rented a bed-sitter in a house in Ealing, West London owned by Ruth Wynn Owen, the founder of the neo-Celtic group Plant y Bran, and had been a student of the Oxfordshire cunning man Norman Gills. She was also a Co-Mason, a member of the French Order of Martinists and had belonged to a small Golden Dawn group practising Enochian magic run by Gerald Gough of the Society of Inner Light. Rosina had only joined this group because her young son was in it and as she was worried, wanted to keep an eye on him!

In the early 1970s we founded our own small operative magical group practising a hybrid mixture of Gardnerian Wicca, Traditional Craft, Regency and ceremonial magic. Unfortunately it did not last that long because of the lack of suitable members willing to follow the disciplines and do the hard graft required of any occult work. From then on until the 1990s I either worked magically with a partner or as a solitary practitioner.

However, to my lasting regret, in the early 1970s Rosina and I did initiate an American woman called Jessie Wicker Bell, who later called herself 'Lady Sheba', into Gardnerian Wicca by proxy. This involved an exchange of letters and eventually supplying her with a copy of our own Gardnerian Book of Shadows. Unfortunately Jessie Bell then informed us in a late night telephone call from the States that "the Goddess" had told her to publish the idiosyncratic version of the BoS we had sent her. We warned her against breaking the oaths she had taken whatever the 'Goddess' had supposedly told her, but the rest is, as they say, history.

In fact, as many British Gardnerians do, we had amended the BoS to suit our own purposes and

needs. One addition was a poem by Doreen Valiente she had published in *Pentagram*, the newsletter of the old Witchcraft Research Association in the 1960s. We were using it in a slightly edited version as an invocation to the Horned God. When Lady Sheba published the BoS she claimed this invocation was part of the family tradition she had inherited in Kentucky. Naturally Doreen was not very happy about this claim or that her copyright had been infringed. However its publication was useful as it proved that Bell was a fraud.

During the early 1970s I had made two important new occult contacts in the form of W.G. 'Ernest' Butler and 'Christine Hartley' (Christine Campbell-Thomson). They had both been associates of the Welsh-born occultist Dion Fortune and members of her pre-second world war Fraternity of the Inner Light. Ernest had been approached by Aquarian Press (now Thorsons-Element) to write a short book on candle magic. Ernest did not feel he was the right person, as he said he did not have the popular touch. Instead he suggested my name to the publisher. He then introduced me to Christine, who was a well-known literary agent in London, in the hope she might be able to help my writing career. She expressed interest in a manuscript on the history of witchcraft I had been working on for several years with Madeline's help, but nothing ever came from the idea and it remain unpublished.

Christine Hartley was an amazing character. She was an archetypal Englishwoman who lived in a large country house in Hampshire, In fact it was not far from where Ernest lived with his wife in a lovely thatched cottage with roses around the door. However behind Christine's genteel social veneer was a powerful magus. Both she and Ernest Butler had been leading members of Dion Fortune's Fraternity (now Society) of the Inner Light. In fact DF regarded Christine as her successor to lead the society until the two women fell out over its direction. This led to Christine leaving the Fraternity in the 1940s and she began working instead with her magical partner Colonel Charles 'Kim' Seymour who had also been in the group. He was a member of MI6 (the Secret Intelligence Service in the UK) and the wartime head of the Dutch section of the Special Operations Executive (SOE). In later years Christine devoted herself to the Esoteric Christianity of the Liberal Catholic Church and to International Co-Freemasonry .

Coincidentally, because of my own previous interest in Dion Fortune, and before meeting Madeline Montalban, I had plucked up the courage to travel up to the leafy and affluent northwest London suburb of Hampstead and knock on the front door of the Society of Inner Light's headquarters seeking membership. Now I know that is not the done thing, but I was a callow youth at the time and knew no better. I was invited in for a cup of tea by the then Warden, an ex-Jesuit called Arthur Chichester, who I was relieved was not annoyed. In fact he seemed quite pleased that somebody had taken the trouble to seek membership in this way. Unfortunately, although he thought I was a suitable candidate, at nineteen I was considered too young to join the Society. He told me to come back in a couple of years when I was twenty-one (the then age of consent in the UK), as that was their firm age limit on membership. However after I met Madeline the Inner Light seemed a bit tame when compared with the OMS and I never went back.

Christine Hartley was that unusual paradox that you often encountered in the old days and sometimes still come across (far more rarely) today. She was an occultist of the 'old school' who, like her teacher DF, was a both a practising Christian and a practising magician, with pagan sympathies. As Madeline also had, Christine believed we had known each other before in previous incarnations. In her case we had apparently shared a lifetime in the Iron Age as druids in what is now Wales and also lived in Scotland at the time of Mary, Queen of Scots. Both make sense to me, as I later lived in Wales for over twenty years, have always been fascinated by the Stuart dynasty, and I am a confirmed Jacobite and member of the Royal Stuart Society. To be honest though, I have no personal recollection of either of these past lives. That, of course, does not mean they did not happen.

Although Christine was a Christian she was not an orthodox one. She belonged to the Liberal Catholic Church, which was an offshoot of the Theosophy Society. I fondly remember one occasion when she invited me to attend a Mass in the private chapel at her country house in Hampshire. This was to be celebrated

by a Liberal Catholic priest friend of hers who was also an Anglican vicar. Coincidentally, I already knew this priest as he had been making enquiries about joining Wicca. He later knew Maxine Sanders when she became interested in the Liberal Catholic Church. Christine said she would quite understand if I did not want to take part in the Mass because of my witchcraft beliefs. She was however sympathetic to the Craft and only recently I was told that she had once attended a meeting of The Regency. However I have no evidence she was ever a member of the pre-war New Forest Coven as has been claimed by the American writer Aidan Kelly. If she had been I am sure she would have mentioned it in our conversations.

As Christine wanted me to be present at the Mass, and it was obviously important to her, I agreed. It must be admitted that the ceremony was beautiful and as powerful as any magical ritual I have attended. As it also included invocations to the archangels I felt right at home. Christine also invited me to join her Co-Freemasonry lodge in West London, which had an Ancient Egyptian theme, and I accepted. Through my membership of the lodge I had the privilege to meet several elderly occultists who had been members of the Fraternity of the Inner Light and worked with Dion Fortune until her death in 1947.

I also made a further trip to Hampstead in the hope of being initiated into another magical group. This was the exotic Ancient Order of the Pyramid and the Sphinx (now just the Order of the Phoenix) practising Enochian magic, the Cabbala and Golden Dawn-type rituals. It had been founded by a White Russian emigre aristocrat and occultist called Countess Tamara Markovna Bourkoun, who had worked with Dr Israel Regardie, in the USA. She was also a Gnostic, a Rosicrucian and a member of the OTO.

I was invited to call upon the countess one afternoon at her house in Hampstead and was entertained with a typically English tea. This consisted of Earl Grey tea served in fine porcelain cups from an expensive silver Georgian teapot and triangular cucumber sandwiches made from brown bread with the crusts cut off.

Madame Bourkoun explained to me that membership of the Order was limited to candidates who were vegetarian, celibate, teetotal and either Freemasons or Co-Masons. As I was none of the first three at that time, I politely declined the offer of membership. It all seemed a bit puritanical to me. However my meeting with this delightful old Russian lady did give me a lifelong liking for Earl Grey tea and sandwiches with the crusts cut off, cucumber or otherwise. Only recently I have learnt that there was an interesting connection between the Russian countess and Madeline Montalban. One of the leading members of the AOPS was a Ukrainian-French nobleman called the Marquis Nicholas Teresdenko. He had founded a Golden Dawn lodge in Paris before the second world war and apparently in the 1950s had known Madeline and was an early member of the Order of the Morning Star.

In 1974 I decided to launch a general occult magazine *Spectrum*. We famously received an advertisement from Jimmy Page of the rock band Led Zeppelin for The Equinox occult bookshop he owned in Kensington at the time. The magazine ran for ten issues before its sudden demise when my partner in the enterprise decided she did not have the time to devote to its production because of work commitments. In 1976 phoenix-like *The Cauldron* witchcraft newsletter, later a magazine, rose from its still smouldering ashes. The original idea for TC came from a telephone conversation I had one evening in the autumn of 1975 with the late Madge Worthington, founder of the Gardnerian Whitecroft tradition. She suggested there was room for another, independent, Craft publication as an alternative to John Score's *The Wiccan*. It had been running since 1969 or 1970 and was the official newsletter of his Pagan Front organisation, now the Pagan Federation.

We printed 100 copies of the first issue of *The Cauldron* in a foolscap newsletter format on a second-hand roneo duplicator. I had bought it using the redundancy payment from the record company in London I was working for at the time. The Atlantis Bookshop took 25 copies and the rest were sent out to *Spectrum* subscribers to complete their outstanding subscriptions. Mostly through exchange advertisements placed in other magazines, the idea of Muz Murray, the editor of the famous Sixties *Gandalf's Garden* counter-culture magazine, we gradually built up our readership. Today TC has subscribers in Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and Japan as well as the UK.

The original, if in retrospect rather naive, premise behind TC was based on the ideals of the old Witchcraft Research Association. My idea was to bring together different individuals, covens and traditions in an independent literary forum to promote informed discussion and tolerance. Obviously that was a rather optimistic goal, but over thirty years later the magazine is still growing strong while many others have fallen by the wayside. So we must be doing something right!

In 1977 I was contacted by E. W. 'Bill' Liddell. At the time Bill was living in Auckland, New Zealand and was contributing articles to *The Wiccan* on his family witch tradition in England. He claimed this tradition had been founded in the 19th century by the Essex cunning man and hereditary witch George Pickingill. Bill stopped writing for TW and began to contribute articles to TC instead. He said, his Elders in the Craft believed I was more sympathetic to "the true persuasion", or traditional witchcraft, than John Score. Some of these TC articles were published in book form by Capall Bann in 1994, together with Bill's contributions to TW, under my rather cheesy title of *The Pickingill Papers* (with apologies to Charles Dickens!).

For the record, I would like to say I keep an open mind about the controversial Pickingill material. This is because, to date, no independent evidence has been provided to support the many claims made by Bill Liddell and his Craft Elders. However, having corresponded with Bill over a period of over thirty years I am not willing to dismiss him as a fantasist or liar, as others who do not know him have done.

In 1992 a young man called Andrew Chumbley sent me a copy of his book *Azoetia: A Grimoire of the Sabbatic Craft* for review in TC. It had been privately printed in a limited edition by his own publishing company Xoanon, As a result of this contact we began a correspondence that went on for several years before I finally met him and his wife. Eventually Andrew invited me to be inducted into one of the covines of his traditional witchcraft sodality, the Cultus Sabbati, which was based in his native Essex.

My induction into the Cultus was the completion of a cycle that had begun over thirty years before when I had met Madeline Montalban and was first introduced to the Luciferian tradition in a magical context. Andrew Chumbley was now offering it to me anew in the form of traditional witchcraft, as he had made his own independent psychic contact with Lord Lumiel years before. That was at a time when that name for Lucifer was not publicly known and Andrew had never heard of Madeline or her angelic magic course. Since leaving the OMS I had kept my Luciferian beliefs secret, but in the 1990s I wrote a series of articles on the tradition in *The Cauldron* using the nom-de-plume of 'Frater Ashtan'. This material was later incorporated into my book *The Pillars of Tubal Cain*, published in 2000 by Capall Bann.

I was very pleased and honoured to accept the rare invitation Andrew had offered me and joined the CS in 1999. Like all true occult teachers, including Madeline Montalban, Andrew had the power of changing the lives of those he taught and this was certainly true in my case. Sadly he passed over to spirit in 2004 leaving a void in the lives of his family, friends and everyone who had the privilege of knowing him in this incarnation. He was a very talented writer, poet and artist and in the Circle of Arte was one of the most powerful ritualists and magicians I have ever met. He was a genuine modern 'cunning man' and a magical genius.

In the 1990s I also made personal contact with the late Evan John Jones through the articles he submitted to *The Cauldron* and we became correspondents and friends. He revived memories of Robert Cochrane and the WRA because he had been a member of Cochrane's covine in the 1960s. After a period of inactivity following Cochrane's premature death in 1966, John revived the Clan of Tubal Cain with the authority of Cochrane's widow. In turn before his own death John passed on the authority to lead the Clan to his sole chosen successor Shani Oates. In 1990 John wrote a book with Doreen Valiente, who had also been a member of Robert Cochrane's covine, about his own individualistic reconstructed form of modern traditional witchcraft based broadly on Cochrane's tradition.

John followed this with a second book on shamanic ritual masking and guising. The material in this book was based on his experiences with Cochrane in the Clan of Tubal Cain and also with another old covine

he belonged to in Oxfordshire. Although there was no connection between this covine and Cochrane, John told me that some of its rituals were very similar to those he had seen practised in the CTC. This contradicts those critics of Cochrane who claim that he made it all up. I edited Robert Cochrane's articles and his letters to Joe Wilson, Bill Gray and Norman Gills (the letters had circulated in the public domain for many years and had become very jumbled, quite a lot of the material from some of the correspondence was mixed up and repeated with information from other letters which did not relate to each other. They also contained personal information concerning RC's life which needed to be omitted. This was the first time the letters had appeared in a coherent and sequential form enabling a wider audience to appreciate them). Eventually they were published, together with John Jones' articles from TC, in two books by Capall Bann, *The Roebuck in the Thicket* and *The Robert Cochrane Letters*.

Looking back on my journey on the Path so far it has been an interesting, fascinating and sometimes wonderful one. There have been a few heartaches, but I have also made some friends along the way. Since I started out on the Path all those years ago there have been dramatic changes in the Craft - not always for the better – and it is unrecognisable from what it was in the 1960s. But the Path is always marked by change and the challenge for the seeker is to accept and embrace it. If you fail to do so then you will suffer for your lack of courage. It is change that creates the opportunities for personal growth and teaches us the lessons we need to learn to progress spiritually. As somebody once said, change is the only constant law in the universe can either accept it with open arms and a smile on our face or stagnate, and that has never been the path of the true occultist.

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Mike went on to publish several of his most influential works on Craft history after this article was published in early 2010. Including *The Children of Cain: A Study of Modern Traditional Witches* – Three Hands Press 2011; *Modern Wicca: From Gerald Gardner to the Present* – Llewellyn USA 2009 (originally to be entitled *Children of the Goddess* and to be seen as a companion volume to *Children of Cain*), *West Country Witches* – Three Hands Press 2010; *Scottish Witches and Warlocks* – Three Hands Press 2013, *By Moonlight and Spirit Flight* – Three Hands Press 2013 and *Liber Nox: A Traditional Witch's Gramarye* – Skylight Press 2014. He also wrote several other titles which are due to be published in future following his death in 2015.