

The Cauldron

2001 – A CAULDRON ODYSSEY

Issue NO. 100 May 2001

From the hundredth issue of *The Cauldron* magazine

With this issue *The Cauldron* reaches the considerable milestone of 100 issues and celebrates 25 years of continuous publication. This is quite an achievement for a non-profit making publication available by private subscription. Especially as it is produced as a one person effort on a shoestring budget. TC emerged from a general occult magazine called *Spectrum* that was edited and published by your present editor for ten issues in the 1970s. The title was taken from a feature in that magazine on rural superstitions, folk magick and herbal lore called Ceridwen's Cauldron. The 'Ceridwen' part was dropped to make the magazine more ecumenical and, of course, the word 'cauldron' has a wealth of esoteric meanings and associations. To most people in the Craft it represents inspiration, spiritual transformation and rebirth.

Basically TC came into existence because a well-known Gardnerian high priestess [Madge Worthington] in southwest London suggested to your editor that there was room for another Craft newsletter as an alternative to *The Wiccan*, the Pagan Front publication founded in 1968. The original idea was to run *Spectrum* and TC in tandem, but this soon became unrealistic while also trying to hold down a 9-5 job. Only a hundred copies of the first issue of TC were printed so they are now a collector's item. They were produced as a foolscap newsletter of a couple of pages on a second-hand roneo duplicator. This venerable machine had been purchased with your editor's redundancy payment from a record company in London. At first the duplicator operated electronically, that is until the electric motor burned out and could not be replaced. This then meant cranking the handle manually to churn out hundreds of printed sheets. What japes! In the early 1980s your editor moved from suburban Surrey to rural south-west Wales and eventually found an excellent printer in Pro-Print of Carmarthen, who we are still with. They took over the production side and in the early 1990s TC shapeshifted into a professionally printed A4 magazine.

The original aims of TC were inspired by the short-lived Witchcraft Research Association. This had been founded in 1964 to bring together Hereditary, Traditional and Wiccan Crafters in mutual co-operation. Unfortunately the WRA was destroyed by in fighting between the Wiccans and other branches of the Craft (Nothing IS new. In fact it is pretty damned depressing that this is still going on nearly thirty years on!). In the first editorial our objective was stated as providing an independent forum open to pagans, witches and occultists of all traditions. Twenty-five years on this is basically still our aim.

Back in 1976, of course, the Craft scene was very different. If you wanted an occult book or a Tarot pack you had two choices in London – Atlantis bookshop and Watkins. Today every city and large town has a New Age shop or occult suppliers. Also most mainstream publishing houses now have an esoteric or New Age imprint. Our first exchange listing in 1977 listed seven other magazines (six of which are now defunct). Today we exchange with nearly thirty magazines and there are many more out there. On the pagan and Craft front nowadays we have such organisations as the Pagan Federation, the Guild of Pagans, the Fellowship of Isis (founded 1976), Green Circle and the Association of Hedgewitches. Most have their own newsletters or magazines, local contacts and often regional conferences. At first glance the situation is much improved since TC arrived on the scene. But, unfortunately, that can also be problematic as the beginner has a wider choice today. This brings with it new problems of information overload and choice fatigue. Faced with a bewildering array of traditions, paths and groups the beginner can easily get confused. In these circumstances there is a greater opportunity for the new seeker to be misled.

Other changes in the Craft scene over the last twenty-five years have been no less dramatic. In the late 1970s and early 1980s neo-paganism became politicised. The publication of Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance* and groups like Pagans against Nukes in the UK were part of this process. Many pagans became involved in the Greenham Common anti-cruise missile and Diablo Canyon nuclear plant demos. Feminists also became interested in the new concept of 'Goddess spirituality' and feminine separatist Dianic Wicca, which eventually led to today's 'New Age Wicca', and adopted those neo-pagan ideas and ideals that suited their radical political agenda. Many feminists rejected Gerald Gardner and his works as 'patriarchal' and 'homophobic', while still using Wiccan ritual elements like the *Charge of the Goddess* without sometimes, apparently, realising their origin. In the 1980s we had the 'Satanic ritual abuse' scare, with sensational court cases in the Orkneys, Rochdale, Epping and West Wales. Despite the fact that witches, pagans and occultists did not feature in these cases it had a large impact. In the 1990s we saw a revival of interest in traditional witch ways, cunning folk and solitary Craft, as well as, paradoxically, calls for neo-paganism to be transformed into a new organised religion for the Aquarian Age.

Over the years TC has reflected all these developments. Since 1976 each issue has been a deliberate mixture of articles, regular features, news items and views concerning all aspects of witchcraft, paganism, folklore and Earth Mysteries. In the late 1970s we led the field with a pioneering feature called Econews examining links between ecology and the neo-pagan worldview. Both it and our Ancient News feature reporting on the latest archaeological discoveries, have been shamelessly copied by more recent magazines. We don't mind. As well as publishing historical material, TC has also highlighted contemporary issues such as the 'Satanic ritual abuse', the threats to our sacred sites from tourism and vandalism and attacks on religious freedom by the fundies. We have also had a policy of re-printing interesting articles from other magazines whose readership does not usually overlap with ours. An important feature of each issue of TC has been our comprehensive review section of new books, magazines and music. We know from your letters, and the readers' survey forms, that you especially appreciate our extensive coverage of new books.

We have been very lucky over the years to have built up a hard-core of excellent writers and artists. Many of these are professionals who have given their services free and we would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has contributed to TC over the years, as without you the magazine would not exist. TC has always been independent and sometimes idiosyncratically so. It has never been the mouthpiece of any particular organisation, group or tradition. This gives us the freedom to speak freely and criticise anyone we think deserves it. In the past some people have had some very peculiar ideas about TC and where it is coming from. We were once famously described as 'a Gardnerian newsletter' and have also been accused of promoting Satanism! Your editor has also been labelled a Tory and a Marxist – so our non-party political stance must work! Such extreme views at least prove that we seem to be catering for all tastes out there in wonderland. As the new century officially begins our mission (which we have chosen to accept) will be to continue to provide our loyal readership with an intellectually challenging publication (we refuse to dumb down!) packed full of interesting articles.

Michael Howard