

Churchill's Druids and Britain's Satanic Prime Minister

It is a relatively little known fact that one of Britain's most celebrated, though far from uncontroversial, statesmen, Winston Churchill, was a Druid. In the first decade of the twentieth century the still relatively obscure Churchill dabbled with a number of esoteric organisations most notably the Freemasons and his initiation into Druidic rites appears to have been an outgrowth of this.

Churchill was born in 1874 and his father, Randolph Henry Spencer Churchill, had been a Freemason and this may well have provided Winston with his first introduction to the fraternity. However Winston Churchill did not actually join the Masons until after his father's death in 1895. Although there are different accounts of exactly when and where Churchill became a Mason it seems that he was initiated into the Entered Apprentice degree in 1901 in Studholme Lodge (no. 1591) in London. Churchill subsequently advanced through the Fellow Craft degree and was raised to a Master Mason in March 1902 in Rosemary Lodge (no. 2851). Another version has him being initiated into a lodge in South Africa in 1903. Churchill remained a Mason until 1912.

As well as conflicting accounts of his initiation into Freemasonry there is also some confusion over Churchill's Druidic initiation, more specifically which of the several Druidic orders did he join.

A photograph in Stuart Piggot's book *The Druids* shows a young Churchill flanked by a number of men, some wearing druid robes and others in ordinary suits. According to the inscription this photograph shows Churchill's initiation into the Albion Lodge of the Ancient Order of Druids in August 1908 at Blenheim, his family home.

Elsewhere in *The Druid Tradition*, Phillip Carr-Gomm describes the same photograph while stating it was Churchill's initiation into the Ancient and Archaeological Order of Druids.

Given the tendency for Druid groups to have overlapping memberships and joint ceremonies, it is possible that Churchill was a member of both these Druid orders. As we shall see, as a Freemason he was certainly qualified for both.

The Ancient Order of Druids (also known as the Druid Order) was founded in 1781 by Henry Hurle. Although Hurle does not appear to have been a Freemason he was a builder by trade and so may have been influenced by the rituals of operative masons which provided the basis for Freemasonry (interestingly the Welsh Druid revival owes much to the writings of a stonemason called Edward Williams, also known as Iolo Morgawg). Whether Freemasonry found its way into the Ancient Order of Druids via Hurle's occupation or not, the latter was certainly heavily imbued with Masonic-like ritual.

The year 1833 was a defining period for the order as it saw a schism over the issue of its future orientation. The majority of members sought to take the order in the direction of a fraternal and benevolent society and they departed and adopted the name United Ancient Order of Druids. The minority retained the original name and continued mixing their fraternalism with mysticism. Both sides in the dispute retained a strong Masonic element and the Ancient Order of Druids in particular had a considerable overlapping membership with Freemasonry.

The Ancient and Archaeological Order of Druids was founded in 1874 by Wentworth Little. Little was a Freemason and his druidic order was designed as an exclusively Masonic society. All of its members had to have reached the degree of Master Mason before joining. The purpose of the Ancient and Archaeological Order was to study the connections between Freemasonry and the druid tradition.

In 1866 Little founded the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, a project not dissimilar to the Ancient and Archaeological Order of Druids. SRIA members were also required to be Master Masons first and just as Little's druid order studied Freemasonry and druidry so the S.R.i.A. also concerned itself with research.

It was three members of the S.R.i.A. William Wynn Westcott, Samuel Liddle McGregor Mathers and Dr. W. Woodman who founded the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an order which has gained a notorious reputation largely by introducing Aleister Crowley to the occult. Little's Druid and Rosicrucian interests seem

to have been brought full circle in 1916 when Nuada, a Druid society and off-shoot of the Golden Dawn tradition was founded. Nuada was based in Clapham, London and was led by G.W. MacGregor Reid. MacGregor Reid was a personal friend of Crowley and was also a Chosen Chief of the Universal Druid Bond from 1909-1946 after which he was succeeded by his son Robert (Chosen Chief 1946-1964).

The connections between these orders and Freemasonry are part of a much wider relationship between the two traditions of Druidry and Masonry giving Little's Druids much to ponder in their research.

The Appletree Tavern in Covent Garden, London was the scene of the landmark meeting in 1717 at which Freemasons decided to organise a Grand Lodge to co-ordinate Freemasonry across the capital and later throughout England. In the same public house, in the same year, the inaugural assembly of the Universal Druid Bond was held, signifying what could be called the institutionalisation of the Druid revival which had begun with the work of John Aubrey.

It is said that the first Chosen Chief of the Universal Druid Bond was John Toland, a member of a Masonic organisation called the Knights Of Jubilation. Toland was chief from 1717 to 1722 when he was succeeded by William Stuckley (1722 - 1765). Stuckley was also a prominent Freemason.

Toland's role in the Druid revival is however questioned. In 1726 he wrote History of the Druids a critical account of ancient Druidry which sits uncomfortably with the notion that Toland was a Druid himself.

Connections between Freemasonry and Druidry crossed the Atlantic. In the United States in the eighteenth century, one Masonic Lodge at Newburgh, New York transformed itself into The Druid Society using the former Masonic lodge for its meetings and adopting much Masonic ceremony too.

Churchill's own association with both Freemasonry and Druidry were short-lived however and his interest in Druidry appears to have been wholly towards its fraternal character with little or no sympathy for its spirituality. In any event Churchill's political career took over at this point. Here, Churchill made his name in a succession of ministerial posts, first as Britain's youngest Home Secretary, and later as Chancellor of the Exchequer and ultimately Prime Minister during most of World War II and again in the early 1950's.

However there was something of a second wind to Churchill's esoteric career courtesy of his knighthood and admission to the coveted Order of the Garter. Churchill was installed as a Knight Companion of the Most Noble Order of the Garter in June 1954. There are a number of competing theories about the origins of this Order, several of which seek to link it to the occult and one in particular to Paganism.

The traditional story is that the Countess of Salisbury dropped a garter at a dance provoking some amusement from onlookers. King Edward III who was present picked up the garter declaring support for the embarrassed woman and the event, possibly because it illustrated an act of gallantry, inspired the idea for an order of knighthood consisting of twenty six knights.

Variations on this theme replace the Countess of Salisbury with the Fair Maid of Kent but the outcome remains the same. The motive behind the King's defence varies too, partly depending on the identity of the woman, but for some there is also an ulterior motive at work. Instead of simply defending an embarrassed woman, through his actions Edward III is credited with protecting an entire religious tradition, that of witchcraft.

The beginnings of the twentieth century witchcraft revival was largely the result of the efforts of Gerald Gardner. Gardner was a member of numerous esoteric orders among which was the Ancient Druid Order. Not to be confused with the Ancient Order of Druids, the Ancient Druid Order claims to be the modern successor to the Universal Druid Bond. Gardner's own contribution to the growing number of esoteric orders (which have since become part of the 'New Age' movement) was Wicca, which has in effect become the modern manifestation of witchcraft. Wicca stands today as a 'denomination' of Paganism alongside Druidry and there are significant overlaps between the two traditions.

Gardner's promotion of witchcraft was inspired by a number of sources including the anthropologist Margaret Murray. Much of Murray's work has since been discredited but is still held in high esteem by some modern witches. Amongst her assertions Murray stated that the garter had been a widely recognised symbol used by

witches to signify that they practised the craft. Thus in expressing support for the wearer of the garter, Edward III was offering protection to witches, and the Order of the Garter which developed soon afterwards was suitably imbued with aspects of witchcraft. For example the twenty six members, half under the patronage of the King and half under that of the Prince of Wales, represented two covens each consisting of the traditional number of witches; thirteen.

The Order of the Garter has had a long relationship by association with Freemasonry. An early history of the Order (published in 1672) was written by Elias Ashmole, known today primarily as the founder of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, but also the subject of one of the earliest recorded Masonic initiations (in 1646). Since the formation of Grand Lodge in 1717, a large number of Grand Masters of English Freemasonry have also been Knights of the Garter.

Since Churchill's death in 1965 the Druid tradition has continued to evolve.

The Ancient and Archaeological Order of Druids was merged in 1966 with the Literary and Archaeological Order of Druids to form the Universal Druidic Order, the new organisation being based in Blackheath, London. This merger occurred under the guiding hand of Desmond Bourke the head of the Ancient and Archaeological Order and subsequently the Universal Druidic Order.

Bourke was something of a lynchpin in British druidry, in addition to the above orders, he is also head of the Ancient Order of Druids Hermeticists which, decades before, had gained attention by holding annual Summer Solstice celebrations at Stonehenge between 1901 and 1914. Bourke is also a Freemason and a member or leader of several other quasi-Masonic initiatic orders thus continuing the traditional association between Masonry and Druidry.

The Ancient Order of Druids is still going strong continuing to hold ceremonies but functioning largely social and charitable organisation. The Masonic character is still present, the Order is still organised into lodges (most Druid orders organise themselves into groves) and most of these are exclusively male. Women members are allowed but their lodges are separate.

That a British prime minister should have once been a Druid may at first seem surprising but on reflection Churchill seems to have followed an unlikely tradition of religious pluralism amongst prime ministers. Famously there was Benjamin Disraeli, a Jew. Less well known and, where known, infamously there was John Stuart, the third Earl of Bute. Stuart was born in 1713 and became an Earl in 1723 on the death of his father (the Isle of Bute was the family estate). Educated at Eton, Bute obtained a law degree and had a life-long interest in botany. In 1736 he became a member of the House of Lords. A Tory Bute has the unenviable reputation of having been one of Britain's most unpopular prime ministers ever having gained the post through royal favour in 1762 and serving in the post until the following year (he was in fact Britain's first Scottish Prime Minister).

Bute was also a Satanist, or at least he was as much a Satanist as Churchill was a Druid, belonging to an avowedly Satanic group though probably for social and fraternal reasons more than theological conviction. The group in question was the Order of St. Francis the most notorious of the so called Hell Fire Clubs of eighteenth century Britain. The Order of St. Francis was founded by Francis Dashwood (hence its name) sometime around 1745. At its core were an inner circle of founding members known as the Unholy Twelve, of which Bute was one. Though several were there for social (and as we shall see sexual reasons) some members were avowedly satanists. Aside from Dashwood, both Thomas Potter and George Selwyn have been cited in this context.

Meetings of the Order of St. Francis were, from 1750, held at Medmenham Abbey (a former Cistercian abbey) and began with a black mass but this was only the prelude for a drinking binge and sexual orgy facilitated by prostitutes (usually dressed as nuns) hired (or coerced) for the evening, the real attraction for members like Bute. According to Daniel Mannix, Bute was a dedicated member, never missing a meeting.

As a member of the establishment Bute was not alone at Medmenham. Dashwood, an M.P. was Postmaster General and among other prominent members was John Wilkes, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Dashwood had also served a turn in this post).

Another member was a poet called Charles Churchill. Unfortunately a familial connection with the Druid

Winston is ruled out by Mannix who states in his erroneously entitled book about the Order *The Hell Fire Club* that Charles Churchill was not related to the family of the twentieth century prime minister.

It was the concentration of influential not to say ambitious political figures within the Order of St. Francis led to the club's undoing.

Despite being 'brothers' at Medmenham, Wilkes (who was a Whig) and Bute were arch political enemies. In fact Wilkes' most well known campaign involved a series of newspaper articles criticising Bute and the King which landed him in court. Wilkes won the case and, having become associated with the popular mood, rode on a wave of mass support from which derived one of the most enduring political chants in British history; 'Wilkes and Liberty'

Wilkes attempted to replace Bute as prime minister by leaking the secrets of the Franciscans, their satanic rituals and Bute's participation. Wilkes was initially successful and Bute was forced out of office following street demonstrations against his misrule. From there on however Wilkes' plan began to unravel as one by one all the members of the club were revealed including Wilkes himself. Dashwood's enterprise went into a terminal decline despite valiant attempts by its founder to keep it going whilst Wilkes was forced into exile.

Bute continued to exert some influence in court circles and eventually died in 1792.

Apart from in the warped perceptions of evangelical Christians who view anything remotely new age (including Druidry) as Satanic, there is little to connect the Satanism of the Order of St. Francis with the Druids except for the rather embarrassing (for contemporary Druids) historical evidence that the ancient Druids practised human sacrifice, something Satanists are perennially accused of. There was however a significant over-lap in the membership of the Order of St. Francis and other Hell Fire Clubs of the time and Freemasonry. Dashwood and Wilkes were both Masons as were other famous 'Franciscans'; the American Benjamin Franklin and the artist William Hogarth. It seems clear that the Hell Fire Clubs were born out of the same eighteenth century 'club mania' that fuelled the Druid revival and the institutionalisation of Freemasonry, through the creation of Grand Lodge, that we have already referred to.

See also

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