

# Merry Meetings

*A candle in the window, a fire on the hearth,  
a discourse over tea...*



Further excerpts from *The Witches' Almanac* interview with author Mike Howard

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*Many Americans may be unaware of the Witchcraft Research Association (WRA), which was established in the UK in 1964. I understand you encountered this group and those involved in it at a very early point in time? What did you take away from your relationship with the WRA and its official publication Pentagram?*

I joined the Witchcraft Research Association shortly after it was founded in 1964 following the death of Gerald Gardner. The idea behind the WRA's creation was to research survivals of witchcraft into the modern age and try to bring the disparate groups and traditions together in harmony and tolerance. Unfortunately it eventually failed in that mission and was disbanded.

The WRA's newsletter *Pentagram* first exposed me to both Gardnerian Wicca and also modern traditional witchcraft. The latter through the articles contributed to it by a self-styled hereditary witch who used the pen-name of Robert Cochrane. His articles inspired in me an interest and involvement in his Craft system that has remained with me to this day. However it would be many years before I was



actually inducted into, what Doreen Valiente had called in the pages of *Pentagram*, the Old Craft, as I will describe later.

*You have also written publicly that at one point in your life you were involved with modern wicca as established by Gerald Gardner in the 1940s. Many books have written about Gardner and his wicca. As one who was initiated into it in the UK, how did this experience contribute to your personal magical and spiritual journey?*



In 1969, I was offered the opportunity to be initiated into the three degrees of Gardnerian Wicca and took it. However, my flirtation with modern wicca did not last long as I was unhappy about certain aspects of it, such as the ritual nudity and scourging. During the 1970s, I ran a small group with my Gardnerian initiator practicing a hybrid mixture of revised wicca, traditional witchcraft, and ceremonial magic. This did not last long as we could not get suitable members willing to follow the discipline and do the hard work necessary for practical magical work. Sadly this problem still remains today. Then until the late

1990s, I worked either as a solitary practitioner or, when circumstances allowed, with a suitable and available magical partner.

*From my point of view, the first book authored by you that I encountered was Practical Candle Magic. In my opinion it is a classic that contains valuable methodology for both the novice and the adept. I believe it has fairly recently been republished in a new, revised, and updated edition by Ignotus Press in the UK. If I remember correctly it contains some formulae for working candle magic that could be interpreted as dual faith observance. Why would modern witches be interested in both pagan myth and magical practices based on Judeo-Christian material?*

As regards dual faith observance, the question really should be – why shouldn't modern witches practice it? After all it is an important part of their historical heritage. If you look at the old accounts of witches and cunning folk you do not find references to pagan gods and goddesses in their charms, spells, and prayers. More often than not it will be petitions to the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Mary and the company of saints. Until modern neopagan witchcraft came along, witches, sorcerers, and folk magicians worked magic within the prevalent religious context of their time and culture. In the medieval witch-cult we can also see there was a mixture of Judeo-Christian material, often of a heretical or “diabolical” nature, folk magic, faery lore and

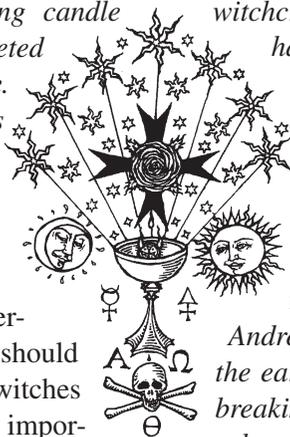
some survivals of the old pre-Christian religious beliefs and practices. Modern traditional witchcraft is very similar in nature.

*In the last fifteen to twenty years there has been a renaissance within the modern witchcraft movement that has pitched the focus away from what is considered to be wicca and towards a more traditional form of witchcraft, one with a claimed provenance that predates Gerald Gardner and his lineage. Early proponents of traditional witchcraft, both in the UK and US, had for the most part remained*

*steadfastly underground, eschewing the temptation to publicise their existence. All that began to change after the publication in 1992 of Azoetia: A Grimoire of the Sabbatic Craft by*

*Andrew Chumbley. You were one of the early champions of this groundbreaking grimoire and allowed your membership of Chumbley's traditional witchcraft sodality, the Cultus Sabbati, to be public knowledge. In full understanding that the CS is a closed and highly secretive organisation for initiates only, what can you tell our readers about it and Andrew Chumbley? In your opinion, what is the importance of the revelations offered in his books Azoetia: A Grimoire of the Sabbatic Craft, Qutub, the Point and One: The Grimoire of the Golden Toad?*

I agree the publication of *Azoetia* created an interest in traditional witchcraft and especially Andrew Chumbley's own unique version and original vision



of it based on the two historical lineages he had been inducted into, which he described as the “Sabbatic Craft” and termed the “Cunning Craft.” Andrew wrote it because he wanted readers to use it as a practical grimoire of modern traditional witchcraft. Since his premature death in 2004, the Cultus Sabbati has continued his magical heritage and work in private and its publishing house Xoanon is publicly promoting a form of genuine traditional witchcraft firmly rooted in historical reality.

On a personal level, I feel very privileged and honored to have known Andrew Chumbley. This is a feeling that I am sure is shared by everyone who knew him personally during his relatively short time in incarnation. He was a multi-talented and multi-skilled magical adept who could express himself through the varied media of writing, poetry, and art in equal measure. It is no exaggeration to describe him as a genius. Although some who were cynical or critical about his public persona may disagree, as a friend who knew him well as a private person and also worked with him as a colleague

in the Circle of Arte, I can say he was one of the most powerful ritualists and magicians I have ever met.

Andrew Chumbley’s books do have a lasting importance for both contemporary practitioners of the Arte and future generations of witches and magicians. This is because they offer the practitioner insight into

an outer form of modern traditional witchcraft firmly embedded in historical precedents, and based on genuine inherited lineages from the recent past. His books, especially *Azoetia*, also present a modernized version of the old craft drawing on various forms of contemporary magical praxis that are suitable and applicable to the 21st century and modern people.

Andrew wrote his grimoires because he wanted people to use them, rather than endlessly intellectually analyze them. He was however surprised, and rather shocked, that they fetched such inflated and ridiculous prices on the second-hand market. However, this is partly due to their high production values, which have made them collector’s items as rare and fine limited editions, but also because serious occultists regard them as important magical works.

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books have been translated into German, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, and Portuguese and published in Germany, Italy, Spain, Japan and Argentina as well as U.K. and American editions.

Mike Howard’s published books are: *Occult Candle Burning* (The Aquarian Press 1975), *The Runes and Other Magical Alphabets* (Thorsons



Publishers Limited 1978), *Candle Burning; Its Occult Significance* (The Aquarian Press 1980), *The Prediction Book of Practical Magic* (Javelin Books 1986), *The Magic of the Runes: Their Origin and Occult Power* (The Aquarian Press UK and Samuel Weiser USA 1980), *The Wisdom of the Runes* (Rider & Company 1985) *Traditional Folk Remedies: A Comprehensive Herbal* (Century Hutchinson 1987), *The Occult Conspiracy: Secret Societies – Their Influence and Power in World History* (Destiny Books/Inner Traditions USA 1989), *Earth Mysteries* (Robert Hale Ltd 1990), *Understanding Runes* (The Aquarian Press 1990), *Incense and Candle Burning: The Practice of a Simple Magical Art* (The Aquarian Press/Paths to Inner Power series 1991), *Finding Your Guardian Angel* (Thorsons 1991), *Mysteries of the Runes* (Capall Bann 1994), *The Pickingill Papers: George Pickingill and the Origin of Gardnerian Wicca* (as editor with E.W. Liddell. Capall Bann 1994), *Angels & Goddesses: Celtic Christianity & Paganism in Ancient Britain* (Capall Bann 1994), *The Sacred Ring: The Pagan Origins*

*of British Folk Festivals & Customs* (Capall Bann 1995), *Way of the Magus* (Capall Bann 1996) *A-Z of Traditional Herbal Remedies* (Senate 1997), *Light From the Shadows: A Mythos of Modern Traditional Witchcraft* (Writing as Gwyn, Capall Bann 2000), *The Pillars of Tubal Cain* (with Nigel Jackson. 2000 and 2003), *The Roebuck in the Thicket: An Anthology of the Robert Cochrane Witchcraft Tradition* (edited and introduced with Evan John Jones. Capall Bann 2001) *The Sacred Earth Guide* (Capall Bann 2001), *The Robert Cochrane Letters: An Insight into Modern Traditional Witchcraft* (edited and introduced with Evan John Jones. Capall Bann 2002), *Practical Candle Magic* (Ignotus Press 2004), *The Book of Fallen Angels* (Capall Bann 2004), *Faery Beasts and Animals of Legend* (Capall Bann 2005), *Secret Societies: Their Influence and Power From Antiquity To the Present Day* (Destiny Books 2008), *Welsh Witches and Wizards* (Three Hands Press USA 2009), *West Country Witchcraft* (Three Hands Press 2010), *Modern Wicca: From Gerald Gardner to the Present* (Llewellyn 2010).

