



## **MADGE WORTHINGTON HIGH PRIESTESS EXTRAORDINAIRE**

Madge Worthington died on 6th November, just a few days short of her 92nd birthday. This great lady was an honorary member of the PF since its inception, and she used to attend the conference and Council meetings until about six years ago when she became too frail.

Madge was immensely important in the development of the Gardnerian Craft. She was initiated around 1964 by her high priest, Arthur, who was in turn initiated by Eleanor (Rae) Bone who died in 2003. Madge and Arthur used to hold their meetings in Arthur's house in Whitecroft Way and to this day her many magical descendants speak of themselves as being of the Whitecroft line. Sadly, in the last few years Madge was progressively immobilised by Parkinson's, and unable to pursue her great passions - the Craft, Green politics and animal welfare.

The following article was printed in Pagan Dawn (issue 151, Beltane 2004) in honour of her 90th birthday. In it, four long term members of the PF pay tribute to Madge. Sadly, two of them, Harry Green and Maureen Brown, have both died since the article was written and will be there to greet Madge in the Summerlands.

## MADGE AND THE PAGAN FEDERATION

*by Prudence Jones*

In the early days of the Pagan Federation Madge was a brave champion of the Old Religion. Soon after publication of the first edition of *The Wiccan* (the forerunner of *Pagan Dawn*), the coven behind the magazine was infiltrated and Madge and others exposed in a lurid newspaper article. It is characteristic of her principled outlook that she did not recant or run away, despite ostracism by the neighbours and increasing estrangement from her family, but continued to be involved with *The Wiccan* and her initiate, its editor John Score.

Madge had come into contact with the Craft in the early 1960s, when she was in her 40s. Here at last was a natural, life-affirming religion, not burdened down with sin and guilt in the way that Christianity seemed to be. Beauty and pleasure were seen as sacred, and Witches were encouraged to be at one with the tides of nature - rather literally in Madge's case. Brought up in various parts of the old Empire, she had sailed a dinghy from an early age. When she married and settled by the Thames she mortified the male yachtsmen in her area by taking part in their annual race and beating them all by a huge stretch of clear water.

Following the newspaper atrocity she hosted the inaugural meeting of the Pagan Front, on May Day 1971, at her riverside home. This later became the PF. By April 1970 she had already begun hosting Witchcraft discussion groups at a coffee house in London, and soon the new Pagan Front encouraged its members to form similar groups across the UK. These duly became the Pagan Federation moots.

Madge's main interest in the 1970s was in spreading the Craft to suitable initiates. With Arthur, her High Priest, she initiated many people and gave them the experience of working in a coven so that they could hive off and found their own. Like her initiator's initiator, Rae Bone, Madge has always said that the trappings of ceremonial magic are incidental to the Craft, which is essentially about channelling the life force.

Many people passed through Madge's coven, but when Arthur died in 1981 she withdrew gradually from active Witchcraft and lived a quiet life as a PF Honorary Member, supporting her animal charities, with no high profile in the Pagan world. It is our pleasure now to offer this impressive and influential woman the recognition she deserves.

## MEMORIES OF MADGE

*Vivianne Crowley Writes:*

In 1974, Madge became my High Priestess. The Alexandrian coven into which I had first been initiated was going through turbulent times and the remnants of the coven no longer felt like 'home'. A second hand copy of an occult guide gave an address for a 'Witchcraft Discussion Group'. I wrote saying I was interested and received a quick response from Arthur, Madge's High Priest, inviting me to afternoon tea in a genteel suburb in Kent. The front door of Arthur's house in Whitecroft Way was promisingly witchy, with overgrown greenery and wrought iron door knocker.

The door was answered by Arthur, a sprightly Gerald Gardner look-alike and I realised that the Witchcraft Discussion Group was a very different age group from the Alexandrians I had been working with - mostly teen witches who had joined at the coven's minimum age of eighteen.

In Arthur's living room I found the discussion group presided over by Madge, a woman of extraordinary presence and aristocratic bearing. Around six feet tall with grey hair to her waist, I guessed she was in her 50s, from my perspective fantastically ancient. 'Would you like some tea?' Another kind middle-aged lady with an impressive amber and jet necklace poured tea into a willow pattern china cup. Neatly-quartered sandwich-spread sandwiches followed, then Battenberg cake and some gently probing questions from Madge and Arthur about my commitment to the Craft. Other afternoon tea sessions followed until next Hallowe'en (the fashion for calling 31st October Samhain came later) I was initiated into Madge and Arthur's coven. The most impressive part of the initiation was Madge's rendering of *The Charge*. It had a different quality from anything I'd heard before in ritual. Later I realised why: Madge and Arthur knew their rituals by heart. With this came insight that by incorporating the words into our hearts and minds, they become part of us and a vehicle for the transmission of energy. The phrase 'word of power' suddenly meant something in a way that it had never done before.

The initiation ended with the removal of the blindfold and I found myself facing a true witch queen - Madge, her grey flowing hair unbound, magnificent in a moon crown, a true representation of the Goddess. I had never known that older women could be so beautiful.

The lessons of those early encounters with Madge and Arthur have stayed with me: their willingness to bring a young witch into their coven, the power of

ritual learned rather than read, that age, wisdom and dignity have their own beauty, and the power of chant and dance for making magic.

Madge and Arthur through their willingness to embrace others became two of the most prolific initiators of their generation. I have no idea of the numbers of their descendants. It is certainly hundreds; it may be over a thousand. Both had physical children. Both too have spiritual children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, great great grandchildren - at least four generations of witches around the world - for their descendants are found across Britain and continental Europe, in Canada and the United States, and in many other countries too. They are a living tribute to the dedication to the Craft, to the Goddess and to the rebirth of Witchcraft of Madge and of her High Priest Arthur who went to the Summerlands many years ago.

*Harry Green writes:*

I first encountered Madge as far back as the 1970s. I had just learnt of Wicca, and excitedly concluded that this might be where I belonged, when I spotted a notice giving details of a moot she was running in a London pub. So along I went, nervously looking for someone reading a copy of *The Cauldron*. Fighting my way through a throng of thirsty office workers, I found myself in the presence of this somewhat daunting and authoritative figure, who nevertheless made me warmly welcome - despite the fact that I was a Fleet Street journalist! We enquirers were a motley bunch, but for all of us Madge opened the door onto a magical world that promised to change our lives for ever. Even in a noisy pub, Madge managed to convey to us the ethos, challenges and rewards of Wicca, while testing our commitment by requiring us all to read Robert Graves's "White Goddess", cover to cover.

By the time I was ready for initiation, Madge had deputed Veronica (now, sadly, long departed to the Summerlands) to set up her own group. "Veronica," she declared, in her inimitable fashion. "You will establish a daughter coven, your first initiate will be Harry, and I will be his sponsor."

And so it was that, on a memorable evening in Dulwich, I had the tremendous honour of being brought into the Craft by two of the finest witches anyone could have wished for - Veronica, the kindest and gentlest of High Priestesses, and Madge, one of the true "greats" of the Gardnerian tradition, who has introduced so many seekers to the Way of the Wise. A tall, commanding presence, with long flowing locks and piercing gaze, Madge is every inch the aristocrat, and always demanded the most of her covenors. On the one occasion that I attended a meeting of Whitecroft, in a small room over the garage, she led us in such prolonged and vigorous

dancing that I ended up completely exhausted, feeling as though I had been put through a bout of extreme gymnastics in a Turkish bath.

Madge has ever been one for bringing people in, not keeping them out. Some have discovered that the Craft is not for them, but Madge gave them the opportunity to find out for themselves. As for the rest of us who have had the privilege of knowing her, and through her discovering our True Path, we are forever in her debt, throughout this life and all our lives to come.

*Maureen Brown*

I first met Madge thirty years ago and was welcomed with open arms into her coven. Fifteen months later I and my partner were asked to take over the running of the coven as Madge's High Priest was in poor health. Ever since that time Madge has had a keen interest in its and my progress. Still whenever I see Madge she asks "Are you doing it right?"

I remember most clearly the feelings of awe and wonder as, at my first degree initiation, the blindfold was removed and she spoke the words of The Charge of the Great Mother. To this day whenever I hear or speak The Charge I remember her look of love for The Goddess, the serious intent of the message and the pleasure she felt in helping another person into The Craft, all shown on her beautiful face..

Madge has always urged me to make the Craft something that is appropriate to the now, very much a religion of our time, with its roots firmly planted in the mists of time and all human experience. She saw dance as a continuum of that experience. She loved to dance and through her dancing expressed her joy in being a part of the life force, surely the greatest form of worship. She has boundless life energy and has seen the Craft and her coven and its offshoots evolve over many years into what it is today. Many witches today respect Madge as the source of their coven; although many have never had the opportunity to meet her, they have heard much about her inspiration and life.

The most notable thing about her is her love and respect for nature, the Earth and the animals; she has been active in the Green Movement and has over the years donated a small fortune to animal charities. The only grief I currently hear her express is that she has nothing left to give. I shall be delighted to be the first to contribute to the PF's fund for animal charities in honour of Madge's 90th birthday. Blessed be Madge, I love you.