

## ‘He Casts the Circle’

Melissa Seims

In August 1959, Gerald Gardner received a letter from Carl Weschcke, owner and CEO of the American occult publishing house, Llewellyn. Carl, having read Gardner’s books, had written to ask him if he had any knowledge about a device called the ‘witches cradle’ which he had seen mentioned in William Seabrook’s book *Witchcraft, It’s Power and Influence Today*. The ‘witches cradle’ was a suspended ‘cage’ that purportedly heightened psychic sensitivity through the use of restraints, combined with a monotonous swinging motion. Gardner replied that he had not come across such a contraption, or its use in the Craft, and went on to say “I have asked many of the older witches, and none of them had ever heard of it.” After a few more letters had been exchanged, Gardner referred Carl to several other people including Margaret Bruce and Charles Clark, for further discussion.

Carl first wrote to Charles in 1961, the beginning of an exchange that was to last about 20 years. In one letter from 1968, Charles mentioned to Carl that he had “some copies of the late G. B. Gardner’s Rituals that he sent me [Charles] for opinions from time to time,” and wondered if Carl would be interested in them. When Gardner had still been alive, Charles and he had discussed the publication of material and Gerald had agreed that this may help people better understand the Craft, and what it was about.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, Charles packaged the papers up and sent them to Carl in April 1969. Extracts from them were published in Llewellyn’s magazine *Gnostica*, but they really came to light when Aidan Kelly obtained photocopies and subsequently wrote about them in his book *Crafting The Art of Magic*, where the term ‘Weschcke Documents’ was first coined.

The ‘Weschcke Documents’ are a collection of papers consisting of 38 typed pages of ‘Gardnerian’ ritual material, including all eight Sabbats, ‘The Old Laws’, three ways of forming the circle, ‘To Gain the Sight’, ‘The Eightfold Way’, the three degrees, consecrations, various versions of The Charge and Amalthean Horn, as well as a copy of ‘The Witches Chant’ (which many now know as ‘The Witches Rune’). Many of them also have handwritten amendments on them, in what appears in most cases, to be Gerald Gardner’s own handwriting. During the 1950s, documents like these were sometimes sent to new initiates for them to copy into their own personal Books of Shadows.

Those of you who have seen Gerald’s writing will know what a ‘scrawler’ he was, and how bad his spelling appears to have been. Aidan Kelly suggests that he was marginally dyslexic,<sup>2</sup> Philip Heselton considers Gardner’s poor English and phonetic way of spelling, to be a consequence of his lack of formal education,<sup>3</sup> and Ronald Hutton has suggested that Gardner’s ‘aberrant spelling’ was an attempt by him to make things look more archaic.<sup>4</sup> I personally think the latter is unlikely as Gardner displays similar traits in his personal correspondence.

These typed documents, whilst obviously easier to read, also exhibit similar poor spelling. A further ‘quirk’ of Gardner’s (in a time before text messaging) was his penchant for abbreviating words. For example, he would sometimes put ‘wd’ for ‘would’ and ‘shd’ in place of ‘should’. Furthermore, he had a peculiar habit of using a typewriters’ small case ‘l’ instead of correctly using a capital ‘I’; in some instances he even uses a capital ‘L’ for ‘I’, and it is not unusual to see a mix of both in the same document. As with so many things Gardner-related, he was never completely consistent in his lackadaisicalness, something that I think is quite frustrating for Craft historians!

Of the various documents, I think one of the more interesting ones is entitled ‘All Are Purified’ (subtitled ‘Ceremony for working with others’).<sup>5</sup> This is essentially a way of casting the circle that starts off with a conjuration of the sword. If we look at the following passage, taken from Gardner’s 1954 book *Witchcraft Today*, I think we can see where the slightly unusual title may hail from: “When drawn, this circle is carefully purified, as also are all who celebrate the rites. Witches attach great importance to this, for within the circle is the gods’ domain.”<sup>6</sup>

---

## ALL ARE PURIFIED<sup>7</sup>

Magus consecrates salt and water.

High Priestess kneels at Altar, takes up Sword, says, "I conjure thee, O Sword of Steel, to serve me as a defence in all Magical Operations. Guard me at all times against mine enemies, both visible and invisible. Grant that I may obtain what I desire in all things wherein I may use Thee, Wherefore do I bless Thee and invoke Thee in the names of Aradia and Cernunnos." Gives Sword to Magus.

Magus kneeling hands her vessel of consecrated Water and Aspergillum. He Casts the Circle, three circles, on the lines marked out, starting at the East and returning to the East. High Priestess follows, Asperging Circle (sprinkling it to purify it) and all present and finally herself. Then she goes round again censuring it. (Everyone in the circle must be sprinkled and censured.) She returns vessel, etc., to Magus, who places them on altar, or convenient place, and hands her Sword [handwritten].

She walks slowly round Circle, saying, "I conjure Thee, O Circle of Space, that thou be a Boundary and a Protection and a meeting place between the world of Men and that of the Dread Lords of the OUTER SPACES, that Thou be cleansed, Purified, and strengthened to be a

Guardian and a Protection that shall preserve and contain THAT POWER which we so earnestly desire to raise within thy bounds this night, wherefore do I bless thee and entreat thee to aid me in the endeavor, in the names of Aradia and Cernun nos." Hands sword to Magus [handwritten].

Magus then summons the Mighty Ones as usual.

High Priestess stands in front of Altar (which may be pushed back for this). High Priestess assumes Goddess position (arms crossed). Magus kneeling in front of her, draws pentacle on her body with Phallus-headed Wand, Invokes (Drawing down the Moon), "I Invoke and beseech Thee, O mighty MOTHER of all life and fertility. 'By seed and root, by stem and bud, by leaf and flower and fruit, by Life and Love, do I invoke Thee' to descend into the body of thy servant and High Priestess (name)." (The Moon having been drawn down, i.e., link established, Magus and all male officers give fivefold kiss; all others bow.)

H,Ps in Goddess Position says **Arms Crossed**

I the Mother, Darksome and Divine,

Mine the Scourge and Mine the Kiss,

The Five Point Star of Love and Bliss;

Here I charge ye in this Sign, (Opens out Arms to Pentacle position)

Bow before my Spirite Bright (All bow)

Aphridite Airanrod;

Lover of the Horned God

Queen of Witchery & Night

---

I think that the usage of the word 'Magus' as opposed to 'HP', use of the term 'Dread Lords of the Outer Spaces', the inclusion of the conjuration of the sword, and the circle being cast three times, are interesting 'markers'. Identical terminology, and similar practices can be found in Gardner's 1949 work of fiction *High Magics Aid*, as well as in *Ye Bok of Ye Art Magical* (aka *BAM*), which is thought to be the oldest, extant 'Gardnerian' 'Book Of Shadows.' *Ye Bok* is currently in the possession of Richard and Tamarra James of the 'Wiccan Church of Canada' and is generally thought to have been compiled and written by Gardner, during the 1940s. In this case, Gardner's

handwriting is actually quite legible and displays a calligraphic style which he appears to have reserved for his magical writings. *Ye Bok* contains several sections which are readily identifiable as being typical of BOS material, as well as a pastiche of rituals and notes on Ceremonial Magic. For example, there are pages of sigils taken from *The Key Of Solomon* (S.L. 'MacGregor' Mathers' translation), plus passages taken from the works of Aleister Crowley, and the Rites of Freemasonry, to name but a few. Similarly, *High Magic's Aid* is also a mix of recognisably 'Gardnerian' material with a generous helping of 'high magic'. It has been asserted by W.E. Liddell that: "Gardner was sponsored into a cunning lodge in 1941 by a New Forest male colleague and was exposed to a quasi-Masonic organisation which combined ceremonial magic, Freemasonry, Paganism and Witchcraft. Exposure to this lodge reinforced his focus on the God and the magus."<sup>8</sup> Whilst this scenario seems to fit the facts, I think it is just one possible explanation why *Ye Bok* has more of a ceremonial magic overtone when compared to the sort of material that Gardner distributed to initiates in the 1950s.

In *Ye Bok* the words 'Magus,' 'Master,' or simply 'M,' are frequently used to indicate the male role. However, roughly a decade later in Gardner's magical writings of the 1950s, this term appears to have been generally superseded by the term 'HP'. This later material also typically has the circle being cast only once, not three times, and then asperged and censed. Additionally, the phrase 'Dread Lords of the Outer Spaces' can be found 'hidden' in plain sight (another idiosyncrasy of Gardner's) in *High Magic's Aid*.<sup>9</sup> "Blindfold and helpless he stood in the Triangle, outside, and cut off from the Protecting Circle, medium between the pleasant world of man and the Dread Lords of the Outer Spaces." Later circle conjurations more commonly have the phrase "...Realms of the Mighty Ones" instead. By the late 50s, the conjuration of the sword is also something that is no longer part of a typical circle opening, although a similar passage is usually given for the consecration of one. This document made me wonder if, when Gardner mentions casting the circle with a 'duly consecrated' sword or athame, he had perhaps intended at one point for this consecration to be done every time. Certainly this would be understandable in view of his love for swords and weaponry.

Overall, it seems to me that the use of certain terminology, the conjuration of the sword, and the thrice cast circle, is more in keeping with the style of Gardner's earliest extant penned works. Due to these similarities, I therefore consider the 'All Are Purified' document to be one of the earliest papers in the Weschcke collection. However, the fact that it ends with the quatrain verse version of 'The Charge', written by Doreen Valiente, indicates that it has to be post 1953 after Doreen had been brought in. Charles himself was initiated about a year later and so I think the date of this document is probably contemporary with that.

'All Are Purified' is interesting not only for the textual dating clues that it gives us, but also because it shows more of an equality, if not an actual bias, towards the Magus, instead of the High Priestess. It is he who first 'casts the circle' and he who appears solely responsible for the consecration of the salt and water, and summoning the Mighty Ones. Interestingly enough, the first degree initiation ritual that is given in *Ye Bok* appears to have a Magus initiating a 'Priest & Witch'.<sup>10</sup> However, the copy of this ritual that Gardner typed up several years later (almost certainly from *Ye Bok*) to give to Doreen Valiente, has been amended so that the Magus is now initiating a Priestess and Witch.<sup>11</sup>

On reflection, I think that the 'All Are Purified' document can also tell us something about the development of the Craft, and its material, and could represent a transition point from Gardner's earlier, more male-orientated writings which included a lot of Ceremonial Magic, to the more High Priestess orientated Covens that seemed to come out of the 1960s. I am not sure what may have brought about this shift but it could have stemmed from the change in cultural ideology which was moving away from the fear and restrictiveness caused by World War Two, to the women's movement and general liberation that epitomized the 1960s. I would also wager that the ever diligent Doreen Valiente could have had something to do with it, especially as she had, with Gardner's permission, already set about rewriting parts of the first BOS that he had given her, in order to disguise traces of the Crowley material in it.<sup>12</sup>

If this 'All Are Purified' document had managed to find its way into more Books of Shadows, our Craft may have ended up with a slightly different 'feel' to it. It could perhaps have been more common to see High Priests consecrating the salt and water, and summoning the Mighty Ones 'as usual.' Instead, there are at times lengthy debates on subjects such as this. My own conversations with Charles Clark gave me the impression that things were much more egalitarian in the 1950s, and the Wica of that time felt free to adjust the rituals to better suit the people in the Coven, using the rites as a basic framework and 'springboard'. A concept that is echoed in Fred Lamond's book *Fifty Years of Wicca*, where he quotes Gardner as saying "...as you gain experience discard those spells that don't work for you and substitute those that you have thought of yourselves."<sup>13</sup>

If we now turn to look at the eight Sabbats that are included in the 'Weschcke Documents', we see the seemingly 'later' term 'HP' consistently used instead of 'Magus'. Furthermore, the similarity of all the Sabbat documents, strongly suggests that they were all typed up at the same time. Fred Lamond tells us in his aforementioned book, "we [the Bricket Wood Coven] liked our feasts, so after Gerald's return to the Isle of Man in the spring of 1958 we decided to celebrate both the cross-quarter days and the solstices and equinoxes with feasts."<sup>14</sup> With all this in mind, it would seem likely that the Sabbats from the Weschcke Documents were written at some point shortly after this date.

What I enjoy about researching and comparing these original writings of Gerald Gardner is the insight that they can show us into the thoughts and mind of old Gerald himself. I don't believe that you can look at these things in isolation, and I think it is imperative to view them as part of a much wider puzzle that included not only Gardner's life and upbringing, but also the political and social climate of the time. These things, along with the fragmentary rituals and teachings that are thought to have come to him from the New Forest Coven, would have affected the way Gerald, and others, wrote these rituals and developed our practices. In turn, this has all contributed to the growing spiritual movement that the Craft has become today.

#### Footnotes

- 1: In a letter to me from Charles he writes: "I remember Carl Weschcke said he would write about those papers given him [the 'Weschcke Documents'], GB [Gerald Gardner] agreed with me it would help a lot."
  - 2: Aidan Kelly, *Crafting the Art of Magic* (Llewellyn 1991: Page xv)
  - 3: Philip Heselton *Gerald Gardner and the Cauldron of Inspiration* (Capall Bann 2003: Page 281)
  - 4: Ronald Hutton. *The Triumph of The Moon* (Oxford 1999: Page 227)
  - 5: The subheading 'Ceremony for working with others' appeared in Charles Clarks BOS, and is not given on the actual document itself.
  - 6: Gerald Gardner *Witchcraft Today* (Arrow Books 1970: Page 28)
  - 7: Gerald B Gardner *Witchcraft and the Book of Shadows* (I-H-O Books 2004: Page 60) and Aidan Kelly's *Crafting the Art of Magic* (Llewellyn 1991: Page 109) as well as on various websites.
  - 8: W.E. Liddell *The Pickingill Papers* (Capall Bann 1994: Page 158)
  - 9: Gerald Gardner *High Magic's Aid* (Pentacle Enterprises 1993: Page 3)
  - 10: Gerald Gardner *Ye Bok of ye Art Magicial* Page 96 (viewable by arrangement with Richard and Tamarra James of the 'Wiccan Church of Canada.'
  - 11: Doreen Valiente *The Rebirth of Witchcraft* (Phoenix 1989: Illustration 12)
  - 12: Doreen Valiente, *The Rebirth of Witchcraft* (Phoenix 1989: Page 61-62)
  - 13: Frederic Lamond, *Fifty Years of Wicca* (Green Magic 2004: Page 14)
  - 14: Frederic Lamond, *Fifty Years of Wicca* (Green Magic 2004: Page 20)
- Many thanks to three 'Messengers of the Gods' namely Paul Greenslade, Philip Heselton and Ken Rees for their helpful comments and advice.

Biographical note: The author has been involved with various Pagan and Witchcraft groups for over 14 years. Last year, along with Dr. Stuart Whomsley, she spoke at the annual conference of the Transpersonal Section of the British Psychological Society on the subject of Witchcraft as a 'conduit' for spirituality and they are

currently collaborating on a book exploring the connections between psychology, society, and modern Witchcraft. Melissa was instrumental in the creation of the Nottingham Goddess Camp in 1999, and currently runs a Wica Coven in Leicestershire, England where she lives with her partner, daughter and a lionized feline.