

The Magick and Mystery of Maurice/Margaret Bruce

by Melissa Seims

This is the story of the mystery and mischiefs of a woman perhaps best known for her exotic perfumes, talismans and mail-order Magick. Her adverts, often later seen alongside the promotion of her animal sanctuary, were found frequently in 'Prediction' and other alternative publications over many decades. She was involved in magickal matters for well over 50 year. Most will know of her as Margaret Bruce, but she was born Maurice Marks Bruce.

Margaret's is a story of change on one level, but also a story of being a constant; true to herself and her core beliefs. Something you will hopefully see for yourself as we enter Margaret Bruce's mail-order world of Magick.

Maurice Marks Bruce

Maurice M. Bruce was born on March 31st 1926 in Darlington, Durham to Montague Marks Bruce and Eleanor Raper. He was born 11 years after his parents' marriage in 1915 and doesn't appear to have had any siblings, making him an only child. Before Maurice was 10, his parents divorced and both of them subsequently remarried. It appears he may have become estranged from his father, for on Montague's gravestone, located in a Jewish cemetery, there is no mention of him having a son or a daughter, referring only to his second wife, nephews and nieces.

Maurice was expelled from school for having '*unnatural and sinister interests of such a vile nature as to make his further attendance at this school quite intolerable*'.¹ When a little older, he became a frogman and a commando in the Navy. He also seems to have a Royal Air Force service number; though I have been unable to find any further evidence of his time spent with the RAF. After leaving the armed forces, Maurice became a clerk at the Darlington Transport Corporation. He left this job due to wanting to live as a woman and not wishing to cause any embarrassment.²

This picture (Fig 1) with the subtitle taken from a Thomas Hardy poem of '*When I came back from Lyonesse with magic in my eyes...*' comes from a 1984 booklet '*Magick*'³ by [Maurice] Margaret Bruce, produced under her Angel Press imprint. It appears on a page entitled 'Images Within Images'. She looks to be around 5 or 6 years old, is wearing girl's clothes and has long, somewhat dishevelled hair. Those of you who have had children will know they can be very strong-willed which makes one wonder if the choice of girl's clothes and long hair was hers or, perhaps her parents? It doesn't seem to reflect the fashions worn by boys in the early 1930s. The only thing I can say for certainty is that at this age, Margaret was officially a boy named Maurice.

In 1951, Maurice married an Austrian woman Margarethe Gabriella Schneider; though she typically used the name Gretel. Unfortunately, I haven't been able to find out how or where they met but I understand that Gretel ended up in the UK whilst still a child as a result of having to forcibly leave Austria in the Second World War.⁴ Gretel was once described as dark and attractive, but Charles Clark, who met both the Bruce's, described Gretel to me as somewhat 'mannish'.



Figure 1: 'When I came back from Lyonesse with magic in my eyes...'

Gardner, who seems to have first known Maurice in the 1950s, was clearly impressed and referred to him as 'The Magician of the North.' In *Gerald Gardner Witch* we find the following extract:

*"There is "One Magician I know, whom I call the Magician of the North, though I don't say where he is North of." This man is the grandson of a man skilled in magical ways, and steeped in the traditional lore of the occult. "But, as so often happens among witches as well, the power seems to have skipped a generation."'*⁵

In this section, Gardner is referring to a claim made in a 1958 letter to him from Maurice where he tells Gardner that his maternal grandfather was a 9=2 grade in the Stella Matutina and also had a connection with the Witch Cult.

Unfortunately, having investigated Maurice's claim, this cannot be substantiated. Maurice's mother's name was Eleanor Raper and her father's name, Alfred Thomas Raper. There are no extant records to indicate that there was ever a Mr Raper in the Golden Dawn or any of its offshoots.⁶ Furthermore, claims of being 9=2 are generally considered to be self-delusionary ego-trips. That said, the main place such elevated grade titles were seen, was in the Stella Matutina's Hermes temple in Bristol. In 1934, when Israel Regardie joined this temple, he found that many of the original Knowledge Lectures had been 'withdrawn or heavily amended, largely because they were beyond the capacity of the chiefs' and found that the chiefs claimed 'extraordinarily exalted' grades.⁷ Alfred T Raper died in 1935 in Darlington, County Durham aged 76. Thus, it seems unlikely that he was involved with the Hermes temple.

Despite this questionable connection to senior membership of the Golden Dawn - considered by many to be the equivalent of magical 'royalty' - Margaret was actually the second cousin, once removed to Carole Middleton the mother of Kate Middleton (now the Duchess of Cambridge), mother of Prince George - who follows his grandfather Prince Charles and his father Prince William, as third in line to the British throne.

Returning now to *Gerald Gardner Witch*, the section continues with a story of how at aged 8, Maurice had turned a small cottage in his parents' garden into a wizard's den and got hold of some magical books including Waite's *Ceremonial Magic*, Barrett's *The Magus* and Budge's *Egyptian Magic*; inventively borrowing these from the local library under the name of a fictional uncle. He made and consecrated 'instruments of the Art' and began making natural perfumes and incense. By the time he was 9 he believed he could influence things magically.

Maurice realised that many natural magical components could be harvested from the wilds around his home. Upon finding that some books gave different names for the same plant and suggested different correspondences, he decided to take a sympathetic magic approach discovering exactly what an ingredient was wanted for, then finding something which had that effect. We are told that after much experimenting and nearly killing himself in the process, he finally worked out how to get the desired results.

A somewhat humorous recollection of this near disastrous experience is seen in a 1958 letter to Gardner from Maurice:

*"The Geomancy Ritual went smoothly until I sprinkled the black poppy and hemlock seeds on the charcoal. The next thing that I knew was that the floor had tilted to an impossible angle and I was lying in a cold sweat and shivering with fear. It was the first time that I had ever heard a colour or noticed that a wall can wear an expression. Fortunately, the incense burned out but it was days before I could look at an article of furniture without noticing that it was looking back at me. I was careful what incense I used after that and kept off the Saturnine Rituals."*⁸

In another letter to Gardner, we glimpse more of Maurice's nature as he writes:

*'...I was always asking country people if they had any spells. I was always inclined to be misanthropic because of the ignorant opposition that my interest aroused. I would much rather have met a Dryad or a Nymph than any mortal – bar none and so I was regarded as "a most unnatural child." I didn't care because Magic was all that I lived for.'*⁹

These early interests went on to prefigure precisely what Maurice became in the 1950s when he established his own magical mail-order supply business which he initially ran from his home at 166 Yarm Road, Darlington in County Durham. He even followed the instructions in *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*, devoting 6 months to the performance of the Abramelin operation. He prepared his house complete with a special sanded terrace into which various spirits could be evoked. In later correspondence, Bruce demonstrates a deep understanding of the Abramelin 'squares', so we can but presume that the operation was successful.

His wife, Gretel, helped him with this endeavour and they had little interference for he told Gardner, he *'had no friends and hated all his neighbours'*. Such independence and self-sufficiency was core to Maurice and Gretel's beliefs and is evident throughout their life.

In the late 1950s Maurice was writing articles and an occasional column entitled the 'Occult Mail Box' for the alternative fetishist magazine 'London Life' (Fig 2). This publication was infamous for readers' letters about dress fetishes (it was banned by the Irish government in 1932), but also deserves acclaim for the inventiveness of its mastheads in the 1930s and the quality of its reproduction and printing.

Madeline Montalban and her then partner, Nicholas Heron were also writers for this publication.

Maurice was a one-time good friend of Madeline's and around 1958 she bought a perfume still for him to make his products. They reputedly later fell out over this and some bracelets that Madeline had ordered from Maurice which he had defaulted on.¹⁰ Bruce also tells us that in 1936, he inherited *'one of the rare "still-room" perfumeries to survive into the 20th century'*,¹¹ As he would only have been 10 at the time, this seems unrelated to the one that Madeline may have bought him.



Figure 2: 'London Life' cover from 1960

In a 'Prediction' magazine article from 1958, there is an article by Madeline called 'Magic You Can Do Yourself'. She talks about helping prepare a manuscript of Maurice's for publication and expresses thanks for both his help with her own researches and for making her a special perfume *'she had long needed for a certain experiment.'*¹²

Madeline is probably best known for writing many astrological and tarot articles under various pseudonyms. These were commonly seen in 'Prediction' magazine, which started its run in 1936, with Madeline's first article published in 1953. She was also the founder of the Order of the Morning Star.

Following the 1958 publication of Charles Cardell's divisive article and advert in 'Light' and Cardell's ire over Gardner's publicity-seeking, there was a parting of ways between the two of them. Cardell then enlisted Olive Green as a 'spy' in order to acquire a copy of Gardner's Book of Shadows. There was now mischief afoot and Maurice was a party to it.

Maurice sent Cardell a Copper Bracelet, telling him it that it was very special and unique as it had come from a 15th century Madonna. The reality was that it was a copper bracelet that Maurice had made for his wife, Gretel, but she hadn't really liked it. Maurice suggests in a letter to Gardner that he will make him a very similar one so that Gardner can claim that he actually has the true original!¹³

In 1959, Doreen Valiente mentions in her diaries that during her visit with Charles Cardell in 1958, he had produced a copper bracelet with the name 'Gretel' on it in Theban Script and sigils of Venus from the Arbatel and the Heptameron. We can confidently say that this was Gretel Bruce's. The inclusion of Venusian sigils is a nice touch and suggests something of Maurice and Gretel's relationship. Doreen, intrigued, had subsequently written to Edith Woodford-Grimes to say the bracelet *'is not the same as ours, but bear sufficient resemblance to be worthy of our attention.'*¹⁴

In this same time period, Maurice is engaged in writing to Cardell using the pseudonyms 'Trog' or 'The Toad,' a creature for which he expressed a fondness. His cards to Cardell would include a picture of a fat ugly toad capturing a fly. Undoubtedly depicting what Maurice felt he was doing, with Cardell being symbolised by the fly. This was several years prior to the inflammatory publication of Cardell's 1964 booklet *Witch*.

Gretel came up with a mischievous suggestion that she and Maurice could start sending phoney relics to Cardell from a fake High Priestess with an Austrian address. They even worked out the finer details of how they could do this living as they were, in County Durham. They suggest to Gardner:

*'We thought of a sort of carved Virile Member made on the same principle as those tumbling clowns who refuse to lie down. Round the base, in a neat Theban Script, would be engraved the profound observation PENI TENTO NON PENITENTI.'*¹⁵ (A tense penis not penitence).

At this same time, Maurice was also sending calculated and deliberately misleading letters to Olive Greene / Olwen Armstrong (witch name Florannis). Olive had now been outed as a 'spy' for Cardell, and in a show of solidarity with Gardner, Maurice delighted in reporting back to Gardner on his acts of mischief:

*'She [Olive] is a genuine trouble-maker and needs something to occupy her mind (I might think of something). The trouble is she knows that I know you [Gardner]. I mentioned that I had occasional correspondence with you and had seen the museum but in an offhand manner as though I were not particularly interested. I ignored almost everything in her letter and concentrated on giving her vague "good advice" on how to become an "Adept". I told her to ignore all the adverts for occult lodges and insist that Charles Cardell teach her real Magick because "he is the one person I know who has an honest approach to magic." ...In fact, my letter was so "innocent" that it bordered on imbecility.'*¹⁶

Shortly after, in early 1960, Maurice further tells Gardner:

*'I have tried to give her [Olive] the impression that I am a semi-literate farm labourer in order to discourage her from writing. If you do have any communication with her perhaps you could help keep up the illusion.'*¹⁷

Further insight into Maurice's prankish nature can be seen in a letter from him to Gardner where he writes:

*'I could send you one of the minor Demons in a bottle. You could exhibit it with a notice saying that if anyone is sceptical, they can open it IN THEIR OWN HOME. You would have to make them sign a form clearing you of all responsibility because the results would be pretty shattering... If you want this you must not disclose where it was obtained. I could probably fix some publicity for this unique exhibit and it should attract the Americans. I think it would be better not to allow anyone to open the thing... In any case the Demon would materialise from time to time within the bottle.'*¹⁸

It is clear that Maurice, at this time, is sending Gardner all sorts of curios for his museum, which included a pressed Datura leaf and is generally keeping an eye out for pertinent witchy objects for Gerald, at local antique shops. He is also engaged with making wands and Athames for Gardner.

Maurice Becomes Margaret

Around the early 60s and definitely by 1963, Maurice publically started using the name Margaret and openly living life as a woman. The first evidence I have found for this would seem to be from the April/May 1963, first issue of 'New Dimensions' magazine which contains the article 'Making Magick Work' by Margaret Bruce.

This must have been a brave move but there is no doubt her strength of character and the support from Gretel, put her in good stead. One can't help but wonder how Gretel really took this. It seems she took it very well and publically supported Maurice by claiming that she decided to change her own name to Gretel at the same time as stated in a May 1966 'The People' news article by reporter Ken Graham. He visited Margaret and Gretel at their home on Yarm Road and recounts his recollections:

*'I was received - by appointment - by the dark and attractive Mrs. Greta Bruce. She used to be Margrethe, but when Maurice became Margaret, they decided to change her name to Greta, to avoid confusion. "Now we live together more as sisters," Greta said... "It is very difficult for Margaret. People have told me I should have the marriage annulled but why should I? She needed me more through this change and I have stuck by her."*¹⁹

Putting to one side, the likely reporters mistake of referring to Gretel as 'Greta', this account suggests that perhaps behind closed doors, Maurice had been Margaret for a while. We do know that Margarethe was using the name Gretel several years earlier as seen in the late 1950s letters between Maurice and Gardner which are signed from 'Maurice and Gretel'.

Margaret rarely mentions or even alludes to Gretel in her more public writings, suggesting Margaret had a firm distinction between her public and personal life. Regardless, Gretel certainly remained by Margaret's side.

In the same 1966 article, we also have a description of Margaret on that day as *'tall, dressed in a high-necked cocktail dress, nylons and wearing charm bracelets and rings.'* She offers the reporter her *'nail-varnished hand'* and makes a joke about how with a 42inch bust it's *'difficult go around dressed as a man!'* This reveals a woman confident in her appearance with an ability to make a joke at her own expense.



Figure 3: Margaret Bruce 'The People' May 15th 1966

Margaret features again in a 1969 news report in the 'Newcastle Journal'. Continuing with her frequent mention of knowledge of old folklore that was passed down through her family, she tells the reporter of her grandfather, whom I suspect in this case, is her paternal one:

*'Her grandfather was a charlatan – her description, not mine – who used to yank teeth out of hypnotised bystanders in market-places and Margaret Bruce, as a youngster, would regularly run off with any raggle-taggle gypsies who happened to pass by her Darlington home...'*²⁰

We also learn that she receives many letters from people asking her for help such as 'I am in love with a married man' and 'I lose £20 a week gambling. Can you make my luck change?'

The reporter continues:

'Miss Bruce claims that, were she that way inclined she could make a fortune. But her advice to the thwarted lover would be "Lay off" and her counsel to the gambler "Twenty pounds a week? You're lucky to have it to lose."

She will sell you a love talisman if that's what you want but will write: 'Real love talismans are wedding rings and marriage licences.' She will send you the Sachet of Venus... but suggest that it simply be given, as a present, with a kiss,'

The reporter describes an exquisite apothecary of jars, sachets and smells and further comments:

*Here and there, sitting in the way of the nice, neat mail order image is a book on witchcraft: - Do you dabble Miss Bruce? – 'I don't.' she says. 'I just know all about it.'*²¹

I can find little solid evidence of Margaret ever having been involved directly in Witchcraft or any magical group though she did have numerous associations with people in magical circles. These included the previously mentioned, Madeline Montalban, Nicholas Heron and Gerald Gardner. She also knew Carl Weschcke (Llewellyn Publication), Melita Denning (AKA Vivian Barcynski / Godfrey) of the writing duet Denning and Phillips and past preside of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, as well as Doreen Valiente.

The best, albeit somewhat tenuous evidence for Margaret having an involvement in Witchcraft is seen in Doreen's diaries. At different times, over a period of twenty years, she lists Margaret as someone she *thinks* attended a Coven of Atho ritual at Charles Cardell's property, Dumbledene, in 1961. I am inclined to think it unlikely Margaret attended. Whenever asked by reporters if she is a Witch, her reply is always to the negative. Margaret is someone who as she grew older, increasingly and loudly owned her beliefs and I have no reason to think that she would have had any qualms about taking ownership of the word Witch if she had considered herself such.

The only thing she does appear to have been 'initiated' into, is the 31 mysteries of Hinayana Buddhism. This claim is given in the blurb for her Burmese Magick inspired 'Salesman Talisman'. As this was on a sales flyer it may be due a pinch of salt



Figure 4: Margaret Bruce, 'Observer' magazine, 1st December 1968

In the mid 1960's, Margaret established her own printing press under the name Angel Press and produced quite remarkable booklets seemingly without the aid of an outside printer. In 1964, under the name Margaret Bruce, she produced her first booklet, *A little Treasury of Love and Magick*. This was followed in 1965 by *The Little Grimoire*. This latter publication used different coloured inks, which was quite advanced tech for those days and some pages show rubricated characters and highlights in various colours. On the back it states that it was '*designed, written, made, printed and published by Margaret Bruce.*'

In the late 60s Margaret and Gretel moved to Helmington Old Inn (which was by then a house), at Hunwick in County Durham where Margaret continued her business. At some point in the 60s she considered buying Aleister Crowley's Boleskine House in Scotland, but found it to be in a state of 'shocking disrepair'²² In the early 70's, they moved into an old converted railway station at Wolsingham²³ in County Durham. A few years later, they moved to High Rigg House farm in St Johns Chapel, County Durham where she established the Margaret Bruce animal sanctuary which she ran alongside her mail order business.

Mail-Order Magick, Manuscripts and Missives



Figure 5: Advert from a 1971 'Prediction' magazine

For well over 50 years, Margaret created magical wares and produced numerous booklets, pamphlets and leaflets. When she sent you one of her magickal products, it would be wrapped in strongly scented leaflets promoting her other products whilst also ironically imploring you to consider the environmental impact of paper.

In the 1980s and 90s there would often be thoughtful stickers added saying things like '*Given with love by*

somebody who truly cares,' or '*Posted within one hour of receiving your kind letter*'.

Some of her publications mention her 'Golden Jubilee' from 1936 to 1986. She would have been 9 or 10 years old in 1936 and this ties in with her having a magical awakening at a quite a young age as seen in the previously mentioned account of her by Gardner.

Margaret had a very respectable depth to her occult knowledge and understanding as seen through numerous incarnations of her mail-order catalogue. When writing descriptions, she often included old-wives' tales, things she learnt from her grandmother, some old folklore recipe she 'discovered' as well as real magical knowledge. In a 1972 news article with the eye-grabbing heading 'Sex-Swap Man Cashes in On Love Potions' she informs us that she is 'Britain's last working folk botanist' and is patronised by nobility. Her specialist area seems to have been in using herbs and resins to create fragrances and incense and she would seek out old recipes at the British Museum.²⁴

Margaret had great skill in making these exquisite perfumes which included a scent for both men and women called 'Satyr.' Made from Musk, Ambergris and Civet plus *'the one un-named and unmentionable ingredient that is essential to its composition'*. Margaret was selling 'Satyr' for £1 a phial in 1972, by the 1990s its price had increased to £20 probably due to price rises on the natural resources she was using. She tells us that *'mere mortals who wish to enjoy the divine fragrance of Satyr perfume may do so only while dwindling stocks last'*. 'Satyr' contains the same ingredients as Crowley's infamous 'Ruthvah'. Margaret however, attributes its recipe to her grandfather Alfred T Raper stating that he used to make it to an ancient Arabian formula and that this was copied and renamed 'Ruthvah' by Crowley.

Margaret also makes a likely reference to her maternal grandmother, Sarah Myers, who married Alfred Raper. One of Margaret's Pamphlets from 1981 is entitled 'Frankincense, Myrrh and Wild Weardale Magick' by Sarah Myers. Margaret's grandmother had long since passed, but I suspect this is a veiled homage to her and was most likely written by Margaret.

Once she had established her Angel Press imprint, things opened up further for Margaret as it meant she could be in control of nearly everything connected with her business.

Her second Angel Press publication, the 1965 book *The Little Grimoire*, conveys a simplicity that you don't see in her later works. It also has comparatively fewer words per page and more, larger images. Margaret often included illustrations taken from alchemical manuscripts and medieval woodcuts as well as using classic Occult symbolism.

Her preface informs us that a grimoire is a small collection of folk spells and recipes often handed down through generations. After signing her preface with her name, she proudly puts a full-page picture of herself as 'Miss Margaret Bruce' immediately afterwards.

You are then led on through a meandering mixture of prayers, magical correspondences, astrology, herbs and essences. You find out how to make a 'Lavender Suffumigation,' 'Love Smoke,' do 'Butterfly Magick' and create a herbal wine called 'Witches Delight.' One of Margaret's hobby horses - 'bogus occultism' and 'charlatans' also rears its head and was something that turned into a veritable Padstow Snapper over the forthcoming years.

Nearly twenty years later, her 1984 booklet *Magick*, suggests she had acquired a different type of typewriter by this point. The typesetting is much better, more modern looking and she uses visually appealing multi-coloured pages. It seems to be one of her longer publications running at just over 60 pages. This 'little book' took her two years to write. The cover is boldly emblazoned with:

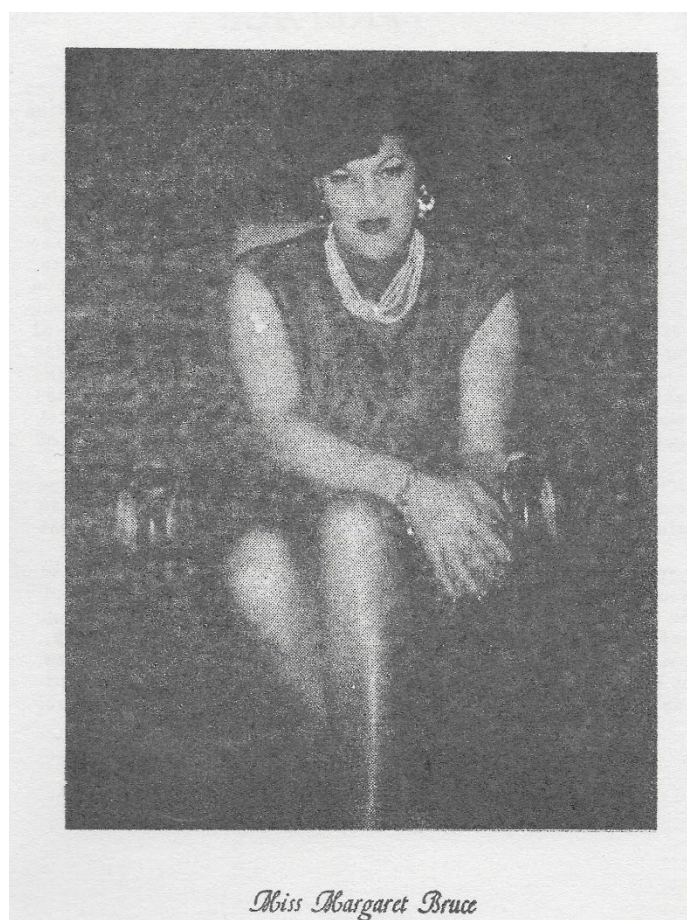


Figure 6: 'Miss Margaret Bruce' from her 1965 book *The Little Grimoire*

'Margaret Bruce's coveted collection of Tried, Proven and Practical Natural, Goetic, Theurgic, Transcendental and Illusory MAGICK as inherited, professed and practiced through seven generations from the year of Our Lord 1777 to the present day.'

The preface includes quite a long and scathing warning about 'Flim-Flam', 'self-styled adepts' and 'razzle-dazzle operators' whom she says have but one skill *'...of turning your money into their money.'* Her hobby horse has now fully matured and is given full rein. Her mentions of bogus occultism and derogatory references to charlatans are frequently seen throughout this book. She had reason to believe that others had been copying her products and shows an ever-growing disdain of fakes offering magic. This combined with her long-standing belief that Magick cannot be bought, seems to have made her even more outspoken and fervent on this matter.

With her rant over, the preface then continues with the wonderful paragraph:

'This is not simply a book of Magick, but a Magick book. The pages are unlimited by numbers and the Magick dwells in the pauses between the reading of each word and the tuning of the page. Just as music is mere noise without the measured periods of nothing between the notes and chords, so the art and craft of Magick comprises the placing of apparent nothingness in dynamic relationship with apparent realities in order to create a desired result. In order to do this, it is necessary to learn the difference between illusion and reality—a task which may be attempted by perhaps one suitable person in a million. Of a million such aspirants, one partial success might be an optimistic estimate. The ability of the reader to comprehend this basic fact is all that limits the Magick of this book.'

Margaret goes on to tell us how her great-grandparents, just after Queen Victoria's 1837 coronation, also made some of the items she offers. Margaret wanted to affirm that she was following in the footsteps of her relatives, continuing a multi-generational tradition passed by blood. We also learn that at the age of three, she would accompany her mum and her aunts to seances where she discovered much deception and trickery and picked up the 'patter and skill' of the cold-reading mediums. This may well be at the root of her life-long dislike of phoneyes and fakes.



Figure 7: The cover of her 1984 book *Magick*

Magick is definitely a book rather than a sales catalogue. Although frequent reference is made by name to products that she makes, there is not a single price in it.

As has been observed by occult bibliophile Clive Harper:

*'Like Aleister Crowley, Margaret Bruce set out to distill all the knowledge she had accumulated in a privately published work entitled 'Magick'. Indeed, her choice of title was surely a nod to the Beast. Yet it must be acknowledged that Bruce's work is far more approachable than Crowley's and is perhaps better thought of as the first real successor to Francis Barrett's The Magus, as an English language 'how to do magic' book.'*²⁵

The contents page in *Magick* is headed by the comment:

'BECAUSE this book was written, designed and printed from the outside towards the middle, the page numbers are only in your mind. That is Magick!'

This book is certainly unique and interesting in that it is a very personal account of Margaret's magickal beliefs and they are not straight off a shelf. No single system of Magick is used and Margaret's at times quite preachy tone, typically talks about one's individual relationship with the Cosmos or Cosmic scheme and the importance of challenging your own personal realities.

Magick is scattered throughout with quotes from various sources; Shakespeare, Paul Daniels (British stage magician), Thomas Moore and Winston Churchill are used and one quote is attributed to her maternal grandfather, Alfred T Raper: *'The more I know, the more I know I don't know'* suggesting that she had a special fondness and admiration for him.

At times in *Magick* Margaret verges on almost sounding like a cult-leader with her confident, vehement assertions and descriptions of what real Magick is whilst casting aspersions on *'our morally bankrupt society'* that has *'inverted all the ancient laws that protected the human race from the horrors that dwell in its unconscious mind.'*

Despite her repeated castigations on the state of the media, phoneys and politicians, Margaret's perspicacious mind does say things of value and provides rich food for thought. With her impassioned writing, she consistently and imploringly challenges your ideas about bogus occultists: *'What none of them can do is give or sell you Magick. That is only found at the end of your own rainbow.'*

Interestingly, there is one paragraph - which names no names, but in which she is clearly talking about Gerald Gardner. It can be found on a page entitled 'Fakes, Frauds and Hoaxes':

'The Phantasy world of cults and covens that sprang up in the post-war years owes more to sewer journalism than to tradition... MUCH of the new folklore that pervades Western Europe and the USA was the brainchild of one man whose cocktail of myths, legends and poetic licence appealed to the middle-class housewife. The purpose of this elaborate exercise was to persuade attractive women to remove their clothes. And it worked!'

WHEN I mentioned the many inconsistencies in his very scholarly rationalisation he was furious until he saw I was not going to 'blow the gaff'. Then he chuckled. "You must admit it's damned good stuff. You need a legend to get followers. Better than Crowley – what! Even the Folklore Society swallowed it."'

We turn now to glance through a 1998 copy of *Margaret Bruce's exclusive catalogue of traditional folk-lore*. Its contents vary greatly in style and typesetting, suggestive of her reusing older fliers of her own creation and simply blotting out and updating the cost section. At the very back, at the bottom is a small Copyright symbol with the year 1957 is on it. I suspect this is when she first officially started her mail order business.

On the first page of this catalogue is a 'Warning'. She uses this as an opportunity to denigrate the press, referring to them as the *'lechers of Wapping and Fleet Street'*. Her thoughts on the occult world at this time are again reiterated as she tells you: *'those who pretend to exercise the occult powers for profit are guilty of fraud'*.

Always bold and assertive in her statements, Margaret had linguistic mastery of word usage, subtlety of meaning and spelling. She would often capitalise words that she wanted to give extra impact to. She continues in her 'Warning':

'YOUR best protection against press propaganda and occult tricksters is to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest what I have written...'

YES, Magick IS real. It exists ONLY in YOUR relationship with the Cosmos. It can't be bought, sold, or hired at any price. Nobody can give you it! Nobody can rob you of it! IF after reading this, you still waste your time and money looking for Magick elsewhere than IN YOUR OWN HEART, you have only yourself to blame!'

This viewpoint, seen throughout her life, seems slightly oxymoronic as isn't Magick what she sells? If you read her material carefully, then no it isn't. There are no 'this will bring you love / money / health / a flying unicorn' statements. What she is selling you are items based in old folklore concerning herbs and scents that have long been known to have tangible effects. With her Talismans, she is telling you what they are purported to do and where their story comes from, but not as something that will definitely do. It seems clear that in her own mind, her magickal products were not, as such, in themselves magickal, but they could become so when the buyer connected with and used them in the right way. If one thinks about this, you can see she has a point. In the beginning of one of her pamphlets she tells us:

*'If the musical instrument you buy will not play the right tune, blame yourself and not the craftsman who made it. Magick lives in the heart just as music dwells in the musician rather than the instrument.'*²⁶

This idea is further seen in her description for her 'Sachet of Jupiter.' After telling us briefly about Jupiter the God and how she gathered the herbs on the correct lunar phase she says:

Those who seek personal advancement and financial benefits may find that the moral support of this old traditional 'money charm' is enough to invoke the 'sweet smell of success'. Not a substitute for hard work and common sense but a fragrant symbol of determination to acquire riches.

Margaret's products are typically accompanied by a lengthy description in which she often tells a bit of a story and shares her extensive magical knowledge. This was on a wide range of subjects from the Pauline Art, Grimoires, Voodoo the Qabalah, Alchemy, Egyptainology, Witchcraft and many more besides. Her written material really does provide a basic broad, instructive and esoteric education.

Margaret tells us that she is one of the very few people that gathers her herbs whilst observing moon phases and traditional planetary hours. She says of herself *'Margaret Bruce is a century behind this degenerate age. Her products and service are, like herself, plain, simple old-fashioned and honest.'*²⁷ Often her products were produced in limited quantities based on what she has been able to obtain and she encourages you to buy them whilst stocks last. This would suggest a classic 'sales tactic' but conversely, of her 'Sacred Oil of Abramelin' she writes:

'I shall not say much about this exquisite oil except that I am very particular about the suitability of those who ask me for it. In fifty years, I have only known of two people able to appreciate its true value. The recipe is like myself, simple but genuine. But the genius required to make it properly and the strength of character needed to use it as intended – those are rarities indeed! If you lack the qualities of a potential Magus then don't waste your money or my time!'

One can't help but respect Margaret's frank talking and blatant honesty and I rather suspect that Madeline Montalban may be one of the two people she mentions as having been worthy of Abramelin's Oil.

As a cat-lover, I smiled when I came across her advert for 'Puss-Pourri' (Fig 8). In a reader's comments section, an A. F. of London wrote in to say *'The PUSS-POURRI is truly magickal. My cats opened the parcel before I could stop them...'*²⁸

Margaret makes frequent use of passages guaranteeing the authenticity of her wares and once again takes the opportunity to warn you about the increasing number of phoneys and 'charlatanic advertisements'. She also somewhat offputtingly tells you that her catalogues *'are issued to approved applicants only.'* Such a statement may well have put some off from ever making an enquiry to her.



Figure 8: Puss-Pourri advert

In her product guarantee, after the standard line about not knowingly misdescribing anything, she tells you in emphasising capitals 'ON THE CONTRARY, THE RIGHT IS RESERVED TO REFUSE TO SUPPLY GOODS, SERVICES OR LITERATURE IN CERTAIN CURCUMSTANCES.'

One can't help but admire her self-belief, indeed this is something that I would say any true Magician needs. I do however wonder about the veracity of the claims she makes about her grandparents and great grandparents due to the apparently unfounded claims of her maternal grandfather being in the Golden Dawn. On the other hand, many of the best Magicians are known for being economical with the truth.

In her later years and throughout her retirement, Margaret established and ran an animal sanctuary at High Rigg House Farm for creatures she saved from exploitation and slaughter. She moved there in the late 70's or early 80s. It was never an official charity and was totally funded by the profits from her mail order company and gifts of money.

Figure 9: Gift donation form for Margaret Bruce's animal sanctuary

Margaret's Twilight Years

In 1990 Margaret officially retired whilst in her mid-60's but continued with her mail order business and tending to her organic farm. By the early 1990s she stopped advertising her magickal wares but seems to have retained a connection with her loyal customer base whilst selling off the final bits from her now dwindling stock. She comments on how her now arthritic fingers prevent her from making more than a few copper talismans per year but she will endeavour to do so for those who desire one.

She informs us on how changes in the law prevent her from ever being able to make some of her scents again. I suspect this is due to the difficulties in obtaining raw materials such as Ambergris, a natural by-product produced by the Sperm Whale. It does not require the killing of a whale but has been difficult to obtain for some years due to it now being a protected species. Rare lumps of Ambergris are occasionally found on UK beaches and are still considered fair game. Her scents that fell foul of these legislative changes included Satyr, Ruggiero and Aphrodite Water and she poignantly tells us they will *'now be no more than memories'*.

Margaret also mentions how she still has two hand-forged Athame blanks and an incised Key of Solomon Hazel as commissioned by Gerald Gardner in the 1950s and says that they are *reminders of how folklore has been superseded by 'new-ageism' in four decades.*

In the final few years of her life, she started writing newsletters that she would send out to her remaining clients. They are full of stories about the nature she sees around her, the animals on her farm, and the difficulties with keeping up with the challenges brought about with the changing faces of the seasons.

For over twenty years she planted trees and did conservational work at High Rigg House Farm whilst becoming largely self-sufficient. Living on the edible produce brought to her by her various animals which included geese and hens. She mourns the loss of days gone by, when neighbours would drop by to barter milk, eggs, cheese and home-baked bread. Commenting on how she now just glimpses *'aloof strangers speeding past in their shiny motor cars.'*

Her anti-media and press stance, as usual, take up significant passages of the newsletters as too does her continuing issue with those she considers fakes. Long comments are made about the decay of governments and society around her and the environmental catastrophes she firmly believes imminent. She talks of how irksome it is dealing with those who try to coerce her *'into using dangerous chemicals and barbaric farming practices, under threat of draconian penalties for non-compliance.'*

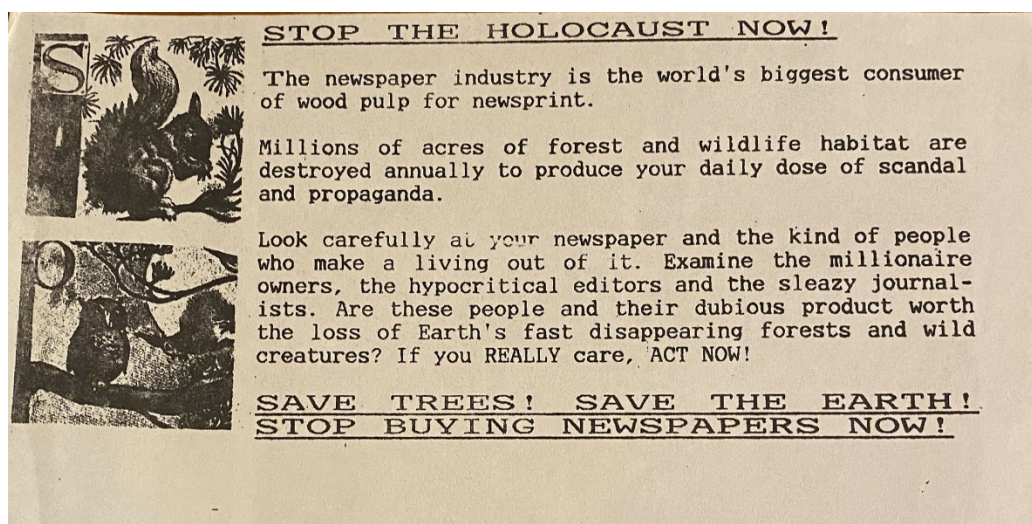


Figure 10: Stop The Holocaust Now!

She shares more of her knowledge of folk-lore, as partially gleaned from various now deceased, relatives and regales us with tales of bygone days. Amongst her beautifully descriptive comments about the wildlife she observes around her, we find this emotive section which captures her essence in her twilight years:

'The infirmities of old age make simple jobs more of a challenge. But having to move slowly and pause for a rest gives one time to observe nature. A favourite relaxation is watching the cloud figures forming and re-forming into every imaginable shape. Somebody is painting living masterpiece's up there and peopling the heavens with dragons, angels, and giant faces. Amongst the mythical monsters appear long-lost friends who revive memories or bring a tear to the eye. But as one approaches the ultimate escape route it makes sense to renew acquaintance with those with whom one hopes to spend the rest of eternity.'

One section of a newsletter reveals more details of the equipment she was then using to produce her written missives. She almost lovingly describes her tiny ADANA printing press, a manual typewriter with a carbon ribbon and a Gestetner scanner that worked off an old car battery. Espousing its simplicity and reliability compared with the emergence of the internet and computers. Margaret was always someone who was born out of her time period, harkening back to the days when neighbours were always good and of a life enmeshed in a natural world that was simpler, purer and truer.

I was able to make contact with a lady who fondly recalled time she spent on the Bruce's farm as a child. After sending her an earlier draft of this article, her reply captured another side to the Bruce's that isn't readily revealed by just looking at the documentary evidence:

*'It brought back memories of perfumes and oils that you could smell in their home and going around to the house for cheese which was great big round cheese, it wasn't just a little piece you got. I forgot about their lovely animals especially the goats, everyone had a name they were so well cared for and the large big dogs but I can't remember what breed they were. Margaret was the more social one, she would do all the shopping. It would be late 70s when I was 7ish when I would go there with my neighbours as they were farmers in near-by fields to the Bruce's, everyone helped each other get the hay in. What I can recall is they were very happy and wish I kept in touch in later life.'*²⁹

Margaret died from lung cancer aged 75 on the 8th of August 2001. Her death is recorded in the registration district of Durham Western, County Durham, her home county where she lived all her life. Gretel passed on two years later in 2003. Their relationship spanned more than 50 years.

Researching the life of Margaret Bruce has taken me on many trips through her nostalgically recollected days of yore. Many of her thoughts resonated with me. Maybe it is something that happens to all of us as we age and we sit melancholically reflecting on 'when we were young'. I delighted in her highly competent and often very beautiful use of language, especially seen in what she wrote in her older years. Her vehement rants always gave me a smile and her words still have the power to give us much to reflect upon.

Many of us too easily sleepwalk into becoming internet illusions of our true selves - I am no exception. Margaret's words remind us of the real connections we can establish in the living world immediately around us; for that is indeed a direct manifestation of the Universe's truth. It can whisper secrets to us in those quiet moments spent by babbling brooks where we may, if fortunate, receive the spirit of a divine authenticity borne from living more in tune with a natural life.

I want to end with some words from Margaret: *'All sanity, all reality, all nature is, together with magick, retreating from the suffocating menace of mankind. If you wish to discover real magick perhaps you should hurry!'*

A note and a request

If anyone should have any more information on the Bruce's or is interested in a partial list of publications and flyers I have managed to compile, please get in touch with me through my website at www.thewica.co.uk Thank you.

Acknowledgments

To all who helped assist me in being a victim to Margaret's muse and especially: Jack and Deidre Staines whose sizable collection of Margaret Bruce's literature (The Deidre Staines Collection), really helped me pull this together. Also, a special thanks to Wicked Uncle Clive, Julia Phillips, Paul Greenslade, Philip Heselton, V H Frater AMDG and Gina Hicks.

¹ Undated letter, likely 1958, from Maurice to Gardner.

² 'The People' 15th May, 1966.

³ Margaret Bruce's Coveted Collection of Tried, Proven & Practical Natural, Goetic, Theurgic, Transcendental & Illusory Magick, Angel Press, (1984).

⁴ Personal correspondence between author and Louise Moore.

⁵ *Gerald Gardner Witch*, J. L Bracelin, p156, IHO Books (1999)

⁶ Based on private correspondence between author and Robert Gilbert whom is considered to be the leading expert on the historical members of the Golden Dawn and its various offshoot Orders.

⁷ *Modern Ritual Magic*, Francis King, p154, Prism Unity (1989).

⁸ Undated letter, likely 1958, from Maurice to Gardner.

⁹ Letter from Maurice Bruce to Gerald Gardner, 22nd August 1958

¹⁰ Doreen Valiente's diaries – October 1959

¹¹ 'Golden Jubilee 1926 -1986' leaflet by Margaret Bruce

¹² 'Prediction' 1958, unsure of month. 'Magic You Can Do Yourself' by Madeline Montalban.

¹³ Letter from Maurice Bruce to Gerald Gardner, 11th November 1959.

¹⁴ Letter printed in *Inventing Witchcraft*, Aidan Kelly, p88, Thoth (2007).

¹⁵ Letter from Maurice Bruce to Gerald Gardner, 11th November 1959

¹⁶ Letter from Maurice Bruce to Gerald Gardner, 1st December 1959.

¹⁷ Letter from Maurice Bruce to Gerald Gardner, 22nd January 1960

¹⁸ Letter from Maurice Bruce to Gerald Gardner, 25th September 1958

¹⁹ 'The People' 15th May, 1966.

²⁰ 'Newcastle Journal' 25th August 1969

²¹ 'Newcastle Journal' 25th August, 1969

²² Private correspondence between Carl Weschcke and Maurice / Margaret Bruce. 7th May, 1968.

²³ 'News of the World' 20th August, 1972.

²⁴ 'News of the World' 20th August, 1972.

²⁵ Private correspondence between author and Clive Harper.

²⁶ 'Magick The Hard Facts' by Margaret Bruce (1950)

²⁷ Margaret Bruce's Perfume Price List (1985)

²⁸ 'Matchless Magick' pamphlet by Margaret Bruce

²⁹ Personal correspondence between author and Louise Moore.