

CALLING ALL COVENS

Castletown, I.O.M.

ANY practising witch who can rev up her broomstick in time should take off immediately for Sunday lunch in a weird old mill in this town. All witches are welcome.

They will be greeted by the resident witch, who is not a woman but a man—he says a wizard is a different cauldron of fish.

The master of magic is white-haired Dr. Gerald B. Gardner, 67, who will declare open the Folklore Centre of Superstition and Witchcraft. Then, under the same roof as a scarifying collection of bones, charms and evil eyes, lunch will be brewed.

The witch-doctor—a doctor of philosophy from Singapore and a doctor of literature from Toulouse—is a member of the Southern Coven of British Witches.

"Of course I'm a witch," he told me. "And I get great fun out of it."

13 WITCHES

A COVEN of witches normally consists of thirteen officers with a chief. They work at weekly meetings called Esbats but come together with all the other covens in the great quarterly meetings called Sabbats—the Witches' Sabbaths.

by

Allen Andrews

"Great fun," says Dr. Gardner, his eyes twinkling.

If the witches are feeling particularly festive they do not wait until "quarter day." There is generally some ritual anniversary that can be celebrated.

"Suppose you feel like a bit of a binge," said Dr. Gardner. "You just call up the others and have some fun."

They do not call each other by telepathy, or supernatural means.

"It might come off," said the doctor, "but it's much less trouble to send a telegram."

CAPERS

THE resident witch of Castletown once attended the ritual of the Winter Solstice, when the witches caper with torches round a fire on the year's shortest day, lamenting the loss of the sun. Gradually they break into a dance which grows more and more exciting as they implore the sun to return.

"A very pretty ceremony," he said. "Luckily, we found a place to do it. Because, of course, if you did it in a back garden in Tooting you'd have the police and the fire brigade on you in no time."

One of Dr. Gardner's regrets is that the tunes of the witches' dances have

not survived. "With the advance of modern science," he said ruefully. "I'm afraid we just tend to turn on a gramophone. Any music will do—Debussy's *L'Après Midi d'un Faune* is good."

In the Folklore Centre is a floodlit memorial to the nine million witches who were tortured and killed in Europe through the centuries, some of the torture instruments are in a case.

OOH! ER!

OTHER exhibits are the skeleton hand of a murderer, a collection of lucky charms, and a magic sign written on human skin.

A complete witches' temple has been reconstructed, with highly coloured sorcerers' designs around a magic circle—in the middle is an altar.

"We had trouble with that altar," said Mr. Cecil H. Williamson, the forty-six-year-old former film producer, who is running the Folklore Centre.

"It had to be the exact height of a witch's navel. I worked out that the average man's navel is 40in. off the ground."

The ground floor of the museum is a "Witch's Kitchen," where meals are served.

Here Mrs. Williamson will serve a special "Witch's Brew" at 3s. 6d. per potion.

"I THINK IT WILL HAVE A RUM BASIS," SHE SAID.

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