

Gerald Gardner and the Church of Antioch

Gerald Gardner was an ordained priest of what would later be called "The Church of Antioch. He was ordained before he wrote "The Book of Shadows", was known by the Church hierarchy to be a Witch at the time of his ordination, was never excommunicated from the Church or prevented from following his "Magickal, Masonic, Witchcraft or Thelamite practices by the Church, and he never "repudiated" in any way his Church membership, remaining a "priest in good standing" until his death. Moreover Gardner's "Book of Shadows" was never "condemned" by the Church authorities.

Nevertheless Gardner did not become a "bishop" of the Church and did not "co-ordain" with any bishops, so that until recently (1987) there were no "Wiccan lines" in the Church of Antioch. Since that time in 1987 however the Australian Church of Antioch has maintained full "Wiccan and Druidic" lines of succession. This was with the full approval of Archbishops Herman Spruit, and Meri Louise Spruit, who also received Wiccan and Druidic lines of succession in a ceremony conducted in Melbourne during their visit with Archbishops Frank and Chearle Bugge. This was specifically stated by Archbishop Herman Spruit as being "in accordance with the ancient prophecy", and specifically "in conformity with the "prophecy and wishes" of Gerald Gardner".

Because this may seem a "controversial" statement concerning Gerald Gardner it will be carefully documented here from available sources in the public domain so that readers can verify these assertions. We do not propose here to discuss the "prophecy" referred to above, as that will be discussed in detail in a later article. This discussion relies upon the information contained in the "Antioch Basic texts" concerning the "succession" of the Church of Antioch. And upon the invaluable research of Philip Heselton in "Gerald Gardner and the Cauldron of Inspiration", a book which is on the official "reading list" for students of the Church of Antioch. (The information given here is based on chapter six of Heselton's book). For those who may not have access to either of these sources and also for the benefit of "clergy students" of the Church of Antioch we have given here a summary with footnotes for the assistance of future researchers.

Gerald Gardner was ordained a member of the "Ancient British Church" on the 29th of August 1946 by Dorian Bishop of Caerleon and witnessed by W. Ohly and M. S. Saunders¹. This "certificate" was proudly preserved in Gardner's private library².

The Ancient British Church was the Church "*founded*" or "*erected in 1874*" *at Marholm in the Stoke of Peterborough Northhamptonshire by the **Right Reverend Jules Fereete (Mar Iulius) Bishop of Ionain communion with the Apostolic Throne of Antioch***³.

¹ See "Gerald Gardner and The Cauldron of Inspiration by Philip Heselton Capall Bann publishing Somerset 2003, Pp 140-141.

² Ibid p. 140,144. We can be certain that Gardner was "proud of his ordination" because the diploma was "preserved" in the first place, much of Gardner's " unwanted correspondence " and "paperwork" was destroyed by himself.

³ Ibid Pp. 141-142.

This "apostolic lineage" has come down directly into the "Church of Antioch" as can be seen by referring to the "Tables of Succession" and the "discussions of lineage" in the "Antioch Basic Texts"⁴.

In order to understand the situation in more detail, it is however necessary to "formulate" and "answer" some "questions" that arise from the material covered in chapter 6 of "Gerald Gardner and the Cauldron of Inspiration", and also a minor "historical point" concerning the "current name" of the Church of Antioch" needs to be addressed.

The first question that we must consider is why when Gerald Gardner was a long time personal friend of Bishop J.S.M. Ward⁵, and had visited his "abbey" Church on numerous occasions, had regularly attended services at the abbey⁶, did he not ask Ward to ordain him? It cannot have been because the "abbey" and the accompanying "Abbey Folk Park had closed in 1945⁷, since Gardner was in regular and intimate "business partnership" with Ward, and there was no question of any "breach in their friendship" at any time and certainly not at the time of Gardner's ordination⁸. It also cannot have been due to any "lack of available Church space", as Ward's religious confraternity and "Church"⁹ were in full communion with numerous other "independent Churches" any of them would have welcomed Ward's use of their Church facilities for an ordination¹⁰.

Gardner cannot have had any doubts about Ward's "apostolic credentials"¹¹ or for that matter about his "Masonic Credentials"¹². Moreover Ward's "theology" would have been much more congenial to Gardner than that of the "Ancient British Church" as the theology of Ward's Church included the worship of a "White Goddess"¹³

The supposition of Heselton therefore that Gardner chose ordination in to the "Ancient British Church" "because he was attracted to the name"¹⁴ simply does not make sense. The only thing that Ward "lacked" at the time of Gardner's ordination was "apostolic lineage" from the "apostolic lineage of the Church of Antioch"! The obvious explanation therefore of Gardner's choice of "The Ancient British Church" is that for some reason he regarded "lineage" from the "Apostolic Succession" of the Church of Antioch as somehow "fundamental" to his future work.

⁴ See "Antioch Basic Texts" p.,4 referring to the "Eastern" lineage of the Church of Antioch and also to the reference on p. 9 documenting the "American Branch" of the "Antioch Succession" .

⁵ Gardner and Ward may have met as early as 1939 (Heselton op. cit. p. 145) Ward was ordained a bishop in 1935 (Ibid page 138).

⁶ Ibid. p. 137.

⁷ Ibid. p.144.

⁸ See all of chapter six of Heselton op. cit. (Pp 135-154) but particularly Pp, 145-154.

⁹ Ward was elected Archbishop of the Orthodox Catholic Church of nineteenth December 1938. Ibid p.138.

¹⁰ Ibid. Pp. 138-140,

¹¹ Ibid p.138.

¹² Ibid Pp.135,144-145. It is of particular importance to note in this respect that Gardner had certainly read several of Ward's books on Freemasonry (ibid p. 144).

¹³ Ibid p.137. Ward seems to have originated this "term" long before Robert Graves famous book of the same name, it would be interesting to research whether Ward's use of this title from 1930 onwards (Ibid p.135.) influenced Graves use of this title!

¹⁴ Ibid p.141.

This supposition is confirmed by another "anomaly" pointed out by Heselton, namely that by 1946 when Gardner was ordained "The Ancient British Church" no longer technically existed as a "legal entity" since it had become incorporated with a number of other "independent Churches" in 1944 into "The Catholicate of the West". In spite of this fact however, Gardner's consecrating Bishop wrote the words "Ancient British Church" on Gardner's ordination certificate. (This would not have rendered Gardner's ordination "legally invalid" because the "Ancient British Church" was "fully incorporated "into the "Catholicate of the West").

If we reject Heselton's rather "cavalier" assumption that Gardner's ordaining Bishop simply had a "nostalgia" for the older name, it would appear plausible that the name "Ancient British Church" was placed on his ordination certificate at Gardner's request to indicate that he had specifically "sought out" lines of succession from the "Antioch lineage" amongst other possible "lines of succession" available within the "Catholicate of the West."

That this latter explanation is in fact correct was confirmed to the author of this article during a conversation with the late Archbishop Herman Spruit on his visit to Australia in 1987. Archbishop Spruit was well aware of (and proud of) the fact that Gerald Gardner was a priest in the lineage of the Church of Antioch. Archbishop Spruit stated to the author that "Gardner "sought out" the "lineage" of the "apostolic chair of Antioch", in accordance with an ancient prophecy known within both "Traditional Pagan" and "Esoteric Christian" sources during his [Gardner's] lifetime, that "valid lines of female priestly succession" would "re-emerge" from the "lineage" of the "Apostolic Church of Antioch" during the late 20th century, and that this event would occur "in the southern hemisphere". According to Archbishop Herman Spruit "Gardner's legacy" [of this "prophecy"] was handed down within the ranks of the bishops of various "esoteric Christian lineages" by word of mouth, coming eventually specifically to him personally.

As I have stated above I do not intend to discuss this "prophecy" and the "independent evidence" for its existence in this study. Suffice it to say here that Archbishop Spruit's testimony demonstrates that Gerald Gardner deliberately "sought out" the "lineage" of the "Apostolic Succession of Antioch". That is all that is necessary for our argument at this point.

There is one further "conundrum" that needs to be briefly mentioned here, although it is not dealt with specifically by Heselton. That is; "Why in the past although it had valid "lines of succession" from the "apostolic Chair of Antioch" was the Church not called "until very recent times" by the name "The Church of Antioch"?

There are several important reasons for this, firstly in relation to the "Ancient British Church" this name was adopted to indicate a Church having "valid lines of apostolic succession from Peter (who according to Catholic tradition was "Bishop of Antioch" before he became "Bishop of Rome") that were "canonically independent" of Rome". After the "incorporation" of several "independent Churches" into the "Catholicate of the West" it was in fact the "lineage" of Ward and the "old Catholic succession" that was emphasised. Nevertheless when the author asked Archbishop Herman Spruit why the name had been "changed" to "The Church of Antioch" in the 20th century? Archbishop Herman Spruit confirmed that this was to "emphasise" the "Antioch succession" in accordance with the "prophecy" known within the patriarchs of the Church as

"Gardner's legacy". This is of course the same prophecy mentioned above and the reason why the contemporary "Church of Antioch" is "pagan friendly" today.

At the very least Gardner's "ordination" demonstrates the fact that the "father" of the "neo-pagan" Wiccan "revival" did not find it at all incompatible to be simultaneously a "witch" and a Christian priest. In fact there is evidence that contrary to Heselton's interpretation) Gardner took his "clerical duties" quite seriously. Heselton misreads Tillet's statement "Gardner was a regular visitor to the Abbey, and frequently appeared wearing a clerical collar". The comma in this sentence is not a "conjunct" but rather a "disjunct". That is to say the sentence should be understood not as "Gardner was a regular visitor to the abbey, and [also at the abbey] frequently appeared wearing a clerical collar", but rather "Gardner was a regular visitor to the abbey, and [also] frequently appeared [elsewhere] wearing a clerical collar. The second reading is also grammatically possible and easily answers Heselton's "objection" that if Gardner was ordained in 1946 then he could not have worn his "clerical collar" at the abbey which was closed in 1945¹⁵. This objection is precisely the point! It determines which of the two ambiguous grammatical meanings is implied by the sentence. It also "disconfirms" Heselton's assumption that Gardner did not "value" his ordination¹⁶.

Moreover in 1946 Gardner "set up" a unique "Christian congregation" that consisted simultaneously of witches (practising sky clad ritual!) and Christians at the "Witches" cottage in the middle of a nudist colony¹⁷! This "Church" seems to have been quite legitimate and to have persisted for at least 10 years¹⁸. During this time Gardner also involved himself in affairs of the Druidic Order of the Universal Bond, where one of his "colleagues" was also a Bishop of the "Ancient British Church". In this context it is interesting to note that Gardner "encouraged" a small group within the Universal Bond who were "simultaneously Christians and Druids" to form their own "Druidic Order" with "pagan lines and Christian faith"¹⁹ this makes Gardner's "intellectual and theological position" absolutely clear.

As I have explained above there is no evidence of "criticism" of Gardner's "pagan" activities from any of the "Christian Churches" with which he was involved period, indeed Archbishop Crow regarded Gardner as his "magical superior" (in terms of jurisdiction) within the OTO! The Church also did not condemn Gardner's "Thelamite" connections or his freemasonry and "Magickal Activities" the hierarchy of the Church never condemned Gardner's "Book of Shadows", and there is no evidence that Gardner ever "repudiated" his priestly vows or his membership of the Ancient British Church, (the Church of Antioch).

All the evidence indicates that Gardner "lived and died" a priest of the "Ancient British Church" (the Church of Antioch) moreover as I have pointed out above there is evidence of an "oral tradition" within the Church of Antioch by which Gardner was "honoured and revered as a prophet" within a small circle of the "patriarchs" of the Church of Antioch.

¹⁵ Ibid p.141, 144.

¹⁶ Ibid p.144.

¹⁷ Ibid p.161,164-165.

¹⁸ Ibid p.164-165..

¹⁹ Ibid p.85.

In the light of the facts presented above we cordially invite both "dialogue" and "clergy applications" from the "Pagan Community". The Church of Antioch has "nine witchcraft lineages", and also "Druidic lineages", within its "lines of succession". We also have corresponding "esoteric teaching" relevant to these "lineages" available within the Church. We especially encourage "affiliations" with all "traditional" (or interested) pagan groups or individuals. We also encourage members to be of more than one "faith community" if they so desire, if those "faith communities" are compatible with the theology and spirituality of the Church of Antioch. Our Communion services are open to all human beings no matter what their "faith status" may be.

As pointed out elsewhere the term "Blessed Be" is common to Jewish, Christian, Muslim and "Wiccan" tradition. Therefore I end this study by wishing my readers

Blessed Be!