



## Chapter 11

# Stonehenge: A Mecca of Celtic Idealism

### The Office of Works

Stonehenge was Alpha and Omega to the Universal Bond. ‘Here the offices now performed by Canterbury, Westminster, Greenwich and Eton were unified. Some day it may become a new Jerusalem and the temple of peace among the nations’, explained Macgregor Reid in 1932.<sup>1</sup> It was to them a living temple, and they were profoundly – and volubly – indignant at all attempts to interfere with their right to celebrate their faith without toll or interference.

In 1918, when Cecil Chubb gave Stonehenge to the nation, the Office of Works resolved to retain both the admission charge and Antrobus’ former caretaker, both of which were anathema to the Druids. The following June, someone (possibly George Engleheart, of the Wiltshire Archaeological & Natural History Society, and later a contributor to *Antiquity*), was writing to the local papers urging that the Druids’ rights to celebrate the solstice should be curtailed. ADUB promptly lobbied the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, urging him to extend his influence ‘to the maintenance of peace within our little Mecca of Celtic idealism at Stonehenge’.<sup>2</sup> The Inspector of Ancient Monuments, Charles Peers, agreed to let ‘these curious persons’ carry on as before, ‘as they do no harm to the stones, nor outrage conventional public decency’. Not, however, as of right: the power to include or to exclude now rested firmly with the civil servants; and that summer (1919), the caretaker prevented the Druids from holding an extra service on another day. In this he was



supported by Peers: 'They have no claim to be treated as other than ordinary members of the public.'<sup>3</sup>

Although Peers and his staff were scrupulously correct in their dealings with the Bond, they were not prepared to exempt them from payment on religious grounds, even though – as they were regularly reminded – places of worship were freely open to the public. It may not be coincidental that Peers was implementing a policy which, as principal architect of the 1913 Ancient Monuments Act, he had largely devised; a policy that specifically differentiated between 'buildings' (classed as 'living') and 'ruins' (classed as 'dead'): 'Buildings which are in use are still adding to their history; they are alive. Buildings which are in ruin are dead; their history is ended.'<sup>4</sup> Keith Emerick has explored some of the repercussions of this classification on inter-war heritage management; for present purposes, it is clear that Peers could have few sympathies with any contemporary religious use of a site whose 'history has ended'.

Next year, when the Druids asked for permission to hold services not just on the Solstice but on two further days as well, Peers instructed his staff to refuse: 'Some limit must be set to this absurd and degrading nonsense.' ADUB complained; Peers endorsed their letter with a memo to his subordinate: 'it might be as well to inform these people that if attempts to take more than is granted are made, we may have to reconsider the concessions already given'.<sup>5</sup>

In the event, they were eventually given permission for the extra days, but were still required to pay the entrance fee. The Bond responded by refusing to hold their service at Stonehenge at all, transferring their activities to the 'Double Circle' instead. Here, in the rain, Reid 'made some strong remarks on the action of the Government in refusing to allow them inside Stonehenge', and gave a lecture which, according to the *Salisbury Times*, was 'listened to very attentively by a good number'.<sup>6</sup>

In 1921, a tirade of letters from ADUB to the government prompted a flurry of correspondence between the Office of Works and Downing Street. Once again, the government agreed to let the Druids use the Stones but insisted on payment. Once again, the Druids made a point of refusing to pay for access to what they considered to be a place of worship: 'You persist in regarding Cathoir Ghall [i.e. Stonehenge] as a Circus or Museum', the First Commissioner was told. Things had not changed for the better since the government had taken control of Stonehenge: 'Tyranny, greater than that of the private citizen, is a great factor of State Control.'<sup>7</sup> Insult was added to injury at the 1922 solstice, when a group of soldiers from the nearby Larkhill base performed a mock-ceremony in

white sheets and false beards, allegedly with the connivance of the caretaker. The Druids were ferociously indignant at this ‘burlesque’, and refused to hold their solstice service there the following year. ‘Pass this word along to the People’, said the handbill they produced, ‘and demand that all Ancient Rights of the People shall be respected. Judge between the Druids and all who stand within the Coward’s Castle.’<sup>8</sup>

### Rakings and Diggings

Meanwhile, the Office of Works was sanctioning the removal of half the site in the name of archaeology. When Stonehenge was enclosed by Sir Edmund Antrobus in 1901, the countryside access campaigner Lord Eversley lamented that the effect was ‘to rob it of its peculiar character – a strange relic of the twilight of the world, standing untouched through countless centuries – and to convert it into an antiquarian’s specimen’.<sup>9</sup> This is precisely what Stonehenge became in the early 1920s. In 1919–20, the Office of Works financed a programme of selective restoration to their new acquisition, and called in the Society of Antiquaries to appoint an ‘expert antiquary’ to supervise the operation. The Antiquaries, however, had more ambitious plans. The President, Sir Arthur Evans (the excavator of Knossos), was nearing the end of his five-year term of office, which had coincided with the Great War. Chris Chippindale suggests that he’d found it ‘frustrating . . . The Stonehenge restoration gave him a chance to make his mark with “a new outlet for the Society’s energies”’; the small excavations required by the Office of Works would only be preliminaries to a grander scheme, “an eventual exploration of the whole monument within and including the circular bank and ditch”’. In 1920, the Office of Works decided that the urgent work had been done, and suspended their operations. The Antiquaries’ chosen excavator, however, Colonel Hawley, was ‘empowered’ to continue excavating the site, which he did, usually alone, for the next six years. Chippindale says frankly that the Hawley years were ‘a disaster’. By 1926, half the site had been dug away, and yet the monument remained as mysterious as ever.<sup>10</sup>

Hawley, although he kept a watchful eye on the Druids and once suggested privately to the Office of Works that all ceremonies should be stopped,<sup>11</sup> seems to have maintained good personal relations with them;<sup>12</sup> but they were upset by the wholesale destruction his excavations were causing, which Reid described as ‘desecration’.<sup>13</sup> As he told Lord Crawford, President of the Society of Antiquaries:

all the rakings and diggings of the Archaeologists have taught us nothing about Stonehenge, and all the promises of today will but lead us to the carefully planned assumptions and suppositions with which the Archaeologists have tried to make a position for themselves. Archaeologists cannot explain Stonehenge. They do not know its message. The Druid Universalists are established in the life and light of its message. There is nothing to be discovered, and it is time that the disfigurement of Stonehenge ceased. The pleasure of a few Archaeologists should not be permitted to disfigure that which is so sacred to others as well as to the Druids. The prolonged excavations of Colonel Hawley have led to what? . . . Archaeologists having discovered nothing definite regarding Stonehenge, now seek to establish an authority based upon assumption – this we Druids object to . . .<sup>14</sup>

In the context of Hawley's work, they could see little reason why they should not bury the ashes of their dead at the monument. They claimed to have been doing so for years,<sup>15</sup> but in the summer of 1924 they formally requested permission. The first Labour Government had just been elected, 'after every Druid vote had been cast for Labour', as Reid proudly announced. It is conceivable that he knew that the new First Commissioner, Fred Jowett, a veteran of the Morris, Carpenter and Blatchford school of socialism, might be sympathetic; at any rate, permission was granted, 'provided that no danger is done to the monument'.<sup>16</sup>

The reaction was immediate. The 'burials issue' became a minor *cause célèbre*, entangled in anti-government politics, and fanned by the fact that it happened during August, at the height of the newspapers' 'silly season'. It was a storm in a teacup, or maybe, an urn: what damage could the burial of two sets of ashes make, compared with the wholesale activities of Colonel Hawley?; but the furore provides an important insight into the relationship between orthodox archaeology, authority and the Druids.

The protest seems to have been orchestrated by the Wiltshire Archaeological & Natural History Society. The WANHS was a particularly vigorous and vigilant organization, well aware of the exceptional splendour of their county's archaeology. It was dominated by the Cunnington family, descendants of Colt Hoare's famous colleague, who considered that Wiltshire was the home, not just of the finest monuments, but to the first and best archaeologists. They were a force to be reckoned with, as Alexander Keiller was to discover two years later when he wanted to dig at Windmill Hill. In the words of his biographer, 'Wiltshire was the Cunningtons' domain.'<sup>17</sup>

The WANHS Annual Meeting, fortuitously held the same month, resolved to send 'an emphatic protest' to the Minister. G H Engleheart,

a scathing critic of the ‘orientation’ theory of Stonehenge, declared that the Druids’ request was ‘an almost unbelievable outrage on a national monument that ought to be absolutely sacrosanct’. He was seconded by Frank Stevens, Curator of the Salisbury Museum, and author of the official guide to Stonehenge: ‘the prestige of British archaeology was at stake in this matter. What would their friends on the Continent say if they allowed this monument, absolutely unrivalled in the world, to become the scratching-ground or burial-place of a rather obscure sect of which they knew nothing?’<sup>18</sup>

But Jowett decided to stick by his decision. The WANHS immediately got on to the local MPs. Jowett dismissed the concerns of Major Fletcher Moulton (Salisbury, Lib), prompting his colleague A J Bonwick (Chippenham, Lib) to invoke the expert authority of the WANHS, who, he told the Minister, ‘are very much troubled about the answer you gave . . . The people of Wiltshire are very much concerned . . .’<sup>19</sup>

The Society of Antiquaries was particularly worried about the impact on Hawley’s excavations. ‘The very idea of burials, even on a modest scale, taking place within the area seemed to militate against the whole scheme of research’, Lord Crawford told the Fellows a year later. If the government had acquiesced, ‘what I look upon as the most important archaeological work in Europe, with the possible exception of Knossos, would have been brought to an abrupt conclusion’.<sup>20</sup> On 26 August, he wrote to Jowett saying that ‘my society is much exercised on the subject’, and offered to deal diplomatically with the Druids rather than put Jowett on the spot – while at the same time urging him to ‘take action’ if they failed to cooperate.<sup>21</sup> His letter in *The Times* (28 August) was indeed a model of diplomacy: ‘The Druid movement cannot fail to affront public opinion by exercising the rights just conferred on them. They will earn gratitude by waiving this privilege . . .’<sup>22</sup> The same issue carried a similar letter from the veteran Boyd Dawkins, as president of the Royal Archaeological Institute; and a long leading article, in which the ‘Thunderer’ clearly indicated where authority ought to lie:

archaeological opinion clearly looks upon the Druids’ projected action as an intrusion and a trespass . . . No wonder the Wiltshire archaeologists are up in arms. They know the stones better than Whitehall; their county may be said to be the birthplace of English field archaeology, and it is their voice, rather than that of an extraneous sect, which ought to carry the day.<sup>23</sup>

There was more sympathy for the Druids down-market, or, more accurately, less sympathy for the archaeologists, tellingly caricatured by D

Wyndham-Lewis in the *Daily Mail* (then the foremost tabloid): ‘Nobody with an ear for music can have failed to be aware within the last few days of the grunts of rage issuing from archaeologists all over the country . . . At the thought of handing over a national monument for such purposes archaeologists are up on their hind legs as one; and (like very aged sheep) they are terrible in their anger and greatly to be feared . . .’<sup>24</sup>

Most papers were as incensed as the Wiltshire archaeologists, however. The *Daily News* (29 August 1924) said that it was ‘the sort of silly thing one would expect this sort of society to want to do’. ‘The Londoner’ in the *Evening News*, who had castigated the Druids nine years earlier, was particularly scathing, declaring Stonehenge to be ‘a temple and a holy place for us English who are not Druids of the Clapham sect, whose souls are offended by the thought of this ancient circle of stones being made a chapel for the rites of nonsense, its earth a common grave-yard for the feeble-witted’.<sup>25</sup>

On 5 September, Jowett capitulated. He wrote to Reid withdrawing his permission, explaining frankly that he was doing so ‘in view of the protests of the archaeologists and the strong public feeling on the matter’.<sup>26</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* declared itself satisfied. ‘In the ordinary run of things it is easier to get a camel through the eye of a needle than to induce a public department to own to a mistake . . . It is to be supposed that when permission was sought Mr Jowett took the Latter-Day Druids at their own pretentious valuation; but having done so with more amiability than research, he was quickly corrected by people of authority.’<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile, of course, Colonel Hawley at the site itself was pursuing his one-man excavation, with the approval of ‘people of authority’. ‘[Y]ou are in favour of *Government by Clamour*’, ADUB told Jowett bitterly. ‘Druids have done more for Stonehenge than all the archaeologists put together. They talk and accomplish nothing.’<sup>28</sup> Reid wrote to Ramsey MacDonald, the Prime Minister, offering to meet the archaeologists in public debate, ‘so that the people may have an opportunity of deciding between the religious claims of the Druids and their astronomic teachings, and the arbitrary conclusions and assertions of the archaeologists . . . are Druids to be classed as inferior, and Archaeologists as superior? Or, are both sections of the community to be regarded as possessing equal rights?’<sup>29</sup>

The following solstice (1925), the Druids were in militant mood. There was a record crowd at the Stones (the police estimate was 3,000), and according to the caretaker’s report, Reid went round the perimeter fence inciting people to tear it down, while his son Robert picked a squabble



15 The controversial Stonehenge turnstile, seen here in the 1920s. (*Wiltshire Local Studies Library*).

with the man on the turnstile, and called out ‘“Come on People”. The crowd then rushed the Big Gate, and burst it open, and also tore down the wire above the Sunstone.’ About a thousand people got in without paying.<sup>30</sup>

For the next two years the Druids stayed away from the Stones. There were rumours that they’d been banned after the troubles of 1925,<sup>31</sup> and it’s true enough that civil servants toyed with the idea of raising the cost of admission on solstice night, ‘in view of the disorderly conduct of the Druids’, but decided against it. In August 1925 they did resolve to ‘bear in mind their attitude next year’, but next year the Druids stayed away. When in June 1928 Robert Macgregor Reid wrote asking for permission to hold a service, he specifically states that ‘we did not seek this permission for the last two years’.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps their exile was self-imposed, and the Druids chose not to risk another confrontation with the authorities. At any event, they celebrated the 1926 and 1927 solstices at the ‘Double Circle’, in 1926 declaring that ‘the Druids had been driven from Stonehenge not because they had done wrong, but because

monetary considerations were deemed to be of greater significance than all else'.<sup>33</sup>

### Prehistoric Wisdom

Although the Universal Bond's first venture to Stonehenge was probably inspired by the Ancient Order of Druids' grand gathering in 1905, there was little love lost between the two orders. The AOD, in the words of Imperial Grand Arch Buckland, was 'a firmly established and properly organized society', and took great pains to distance itself from the Universal Bond when the latter's activities generated bad publicity.<sup>34</sup> However, on one subject at least, they were both agreed: the wisdom and the virtue of their prehistoric antecedents. The AOD were proud of the connection, mediated through the monument: as Buckland told his members, the link the Stones made between their order and the original Druids was 'wonderful to contemplate'.<sup>35</sup>

The theme of prehistoric wisdom recurred regularly in Reid's public utterances. A week after the AOD gathering in 1925, Reid preached ancient wisdom to 'the biggest crowd within living memory' at the summer solstice: 'Men told them that their forefathers were savages. When they said that they lied. The men who raised these stones possessed information greater than the majority of our people possessed to-day. He asked them not to believe that we were descended from mere barbarians.'<sup>36</sup> Although the Druids were defeated over the burial issue, and Stonehenge was accordingly 'won' for orthodoxy, the public was clearly listening to the Druids. Some academic reaction was inevitable.

Contemporary archaeological interest in 'the meaning of Stonehenge' centred around the issue of 'orientation'. During the nineteenth century, there had been a widely held but vague belief that Stonehenge had been used for sun-worship; in 1906, this was refined by the astronomer Sir Norman Lockyer into an influential theory that the monument had had an astronomical function.<sup>37</sup> Lockyer's ideas were firmly resisted by many archaeologists, and none more so than George Engleheart, of the WANHS. Engleheart believed that Hawley's excavations 'went far to banish for good and all the solar theory of the origin and purpose of Stonehenge . . . nowhere could anyone point to a stone ring in any part of the world that had been proved to have any connection with sun worship.' Like Sir Arthur Evans, he believed that Stonehenge had been built as a tomb; indeed, as readers learned from his *Antiquity* article 'Concerning



Orientation', '[t]he sepulchral origin of Stonehenge can no longer be questioned'.<sup>38</sup> Mortimer Wheeler likewise deplored the fact that Lockyer-style speculation had 'led a generation of antiquaries to waste much time and ink upon the supposed astronomical properties of these circles', and his comments were cited by Kendrick in 1927, who assured his readers that 'there is no ethnographical warrant that primitive man of the culture-level represented by the circles was capable of elaborate astronomical measurements of this kind'.<sup>39</sup> Not only was the contemporary Stonehenge solstice thus deprived of all legitimacy, but the intellectual capacities of its builders were dismissed according to the best social evolutionary preconceptions.

Other archaeologists sought to dismantle the perceived connection between Stonehenge and the Druids. O G S Crawford's brief letter to *The Times* during the burials controversy attacked ADUB's two 'incorrect' assumptions: 'that their Order is descended from the real Druids, and that the real Druids were connected with Stonehenge'.<sup>40</sup> Boyd Dawkins similarly tried to discredit the Druids' claims to represent 'the most ancient faith' by stressing the time-gap between the building of Stonehenge and the date of the 'Celtic' Druid cult.<sup>41</sup>

The theme was developed in 1927 by Thomas Kendrick, Christopher Hawkes' colleague in the Department of British & Medieval Antiquities at the British Museum, in his *The Druids: A Study in Keltic Prehistory*. The book began by acknowledging the extent of public interest in his subject: 'There is little need to remark upon the inextinguishable affection with which the Druids are still regarded in the popular imagination.' To the 'unlettered public . . . the Druids are rapidly becoming synonymous with the Ancient Britons, that is to say, the pre-Roman population of this country'.<sup>42</sup> The timing of *The Druids* is testimony to the strength of public feeling and the need for orthodoxy to reply effectively to the much-publicized claims of the Druids. But although Kendrick's credentials were certainly pukka, it's a surprising book.

Clearly and conscientiously written, Kendrick sought to demonstrate the lack of continuity between the original builders of Stonehenge, the 'Celtic' Druids of the Iron Age, and the present day; but then provided startling and unexpected succour for the Druid cause by suggesting that the *present* structure may indeed have been built by the Druids. He based this claim on what he took to be 'the indirect influence of classical architecture', a recorded La Tène burial, and the 'surprising amount of British and Romano-British pottery' that Hawley's diggings had uncovered, an ironic twist:

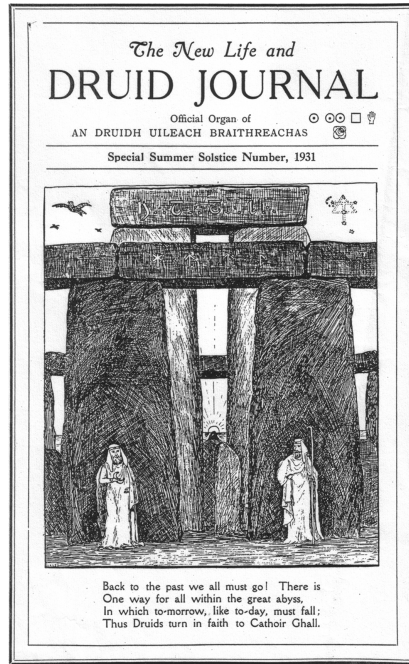
My view, then, is that the Kelticized population of Wessex took advantage of the ancient *national* sanctity of the old circle-site on Salisbury Plain to construct thereupon a temple for their faith that should serve as a rallying-point, and more than that – a stimulus, for Druidism after the beginning of the failure of the order in Gaul, that is to say, in the 1st century BC. And in the final effort to assert the national faith in the face of the distant rumours of Roman aggression, the Britains [*sic*] tried to build for themselves, though preserving the ancient circle- and grove-tradition, as grand a temple as those the refugee Druids from Gaul had seen erected by the Greeks and the Romans.<sup>43</sup>

He even suggested that Druid re-use of the monument might have survived the fall of Rome (even if not by very long). Kendrick was well aware that ‘even this much will be challenged by most archaeologists of to-day’, but criticism was surprisingly muted. The Cunningtons, for instance, were suitably impressed by the man from the British Museum, and revised their histories accordingly. ‘The inception may after all have been due to that romantic order, the Druids’, wrote R H Cunnington in 1935.<sup>44</sup>

Kendrick’s case was picked up promptly by the author and occultist Lewis Spence, whose book, *The Mysteries of Britain; or, the Secret Rites and Traditions of Ancient Britain restored*, was published the following year (1928). Kendrick, said Spence, ‘has succeeded in placing the entire question on a much more tolerable basis than formerly’; he had supplied ‘a treatment of the subject so convincing, yet so free from dogmatism as to provide a most suitable starting-point’ for the thesis of Spence’s own book.<sup>45</sup> He then went on to refute Kendrick’s claims for lack of continuity and to set out the beliefs of the Druids as Spence perceived them, based upon a panoply of Celtic literature whose authenticity Kendrick would certainly have questioned. Orthodoxy was becoming disoriented.

### Information Control

Although the newspapers reported no more trouble, in 1930 a retired army major informed the Office of Works that Macgregor Reid was still inciting visitors to tear down the fences, amongst other things: ‘he spoke against the Church and religion and upheld the Soviet Government . . . His general speaking was communistic and anti-Government . . . Although one or two present argued with him there were others who shook him by the hand as evidence of their appreciation of what he said.’<sup>46</sup>



16 Sale of *The New Life and Druid Journal* at Stonehenge was banned.

The Office of Works did not take any action over this part of the Major's allegations, but they were concerned over his claim that '[c]ertain pamphlets were being sold within Stonehenge by a girl and a man who were evidently his associates'. The pamphlet in question was *The New Life*, now revamped as *The New Life & Druid Journal* and sporting a rather stylish, arts-and-craftsy trilithon on the front cover. Inquiries were duly made of the (new) custodian, who reported that 'there was nothing to take exception to in it'.<sup>47</sup> Further complaints were received the next year from 'local residents', however, perhaps involved in a protest Christian service that was held at this solstice. Sensing trouble, Arthur Peacock, editor of the *Journal*, sent a courteous letter to the Office of Works asking for formal permission to sell the *Journal* as they had been doing. He was refused: 'none but official publications can be sold at ancient monuments in their custody'. It does not seem that any slight was intended – nine years earlier, Peers had turned down a similar request from the WANHS – but the Druids felt strongly that the official guide-book was biased

against them. 'It is only just and fair that if Mr Stevens' book which gives the anti-Druid view is on sale at the turnstile, then on the day of our Service, at least, copies of the *Druid Journal* might be placed with the caretaker, and then made available to enquirers who might wish to have them', wrote Peacock.<sup>48</sup>

The ban, Reid claimed, was the last straw. Not only had they had been 'forced to beg from an authority of the Earth to worship in their own temple', but '[t]he ideas contained in the guide book to Stonehenge issued by the Government brought shame to every man and woman who understood aught about this great question'.<sup>49</sup> This was the last solstice they'd hold at Stonehenge, he declared, and announced plans to build a new temple at the 'Double Circle': a scheme for which, he claimed, he had already raised £4,000. This utterance was designed to upset everyone, particularly in view of the contemporary National Trust campaign to have all visible buildings in the Stonehenge landscape removed. '[T]o erect it within sight of genuine Stonehenge is a proposition of atrociously bad taste', opined the *Wiltshire Gazette* (30 June 1932).

No more was heard of the scheme, but the Universal Bond duly stayed away from the Stones for the rest of the decade. As if to compensate, the AOD and other Druidical groups held ceremonies regularly at other times of the summer, but to many, the Druids had become synonymous with the Stonehenge solstice. Numbers of participants dwindled steadily during the 1930s, and at least one observer attributed some of this decline to Druidic abstinence.<sup>50</sup>

### The Druid Hermeticists

By 1932 Reid was by any reckoning getting on a bit, ample excuse for being a tad less confrontational; but it was his old calling of Nature Cure that lured him away from the Stones. Nature Cure had been enjoying quite a revival during the 1920s, and Reid somehow found the money to open his own 'Nature Camp' in Sussex, 'a communal settlement . . . where men and women in the vanguard movement of politics and religion might come for rest and recuperation'. He died in 1946.<sup>51</sup>

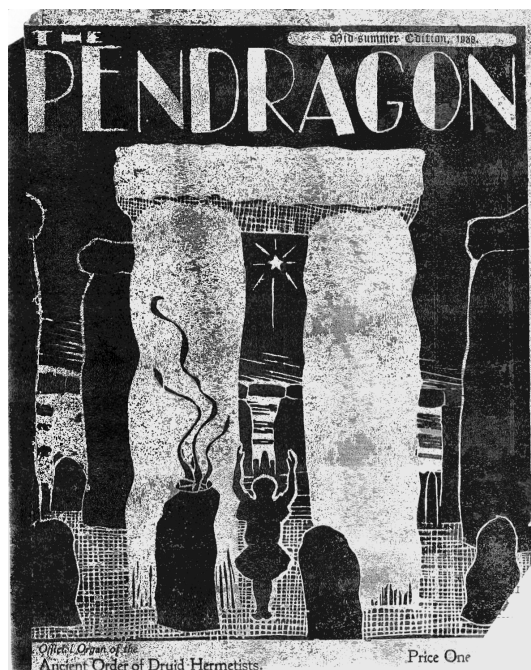
After Reid's *de facto* retirement, his spiritual empire divided naturally into two. Arthur Peacock, who succeeded Reid as Minister of the Clapham church in 1937, endeavoured to bring it into line with more orthodox forms of Universalism by making contact with the wider (essentially American) Universalist community; but in August 1944, the building was

bombed and subsequently demolished. The Church then met in various buildings in central London, until Peacock eventually took himself, and presumably whatever was left of the Universalist congregation, into the Unitarian church.<sup>52</sup>

Macgregor Reid's Druidic mantle was inherited by George W Smith, also from Clapham, who was as proud as Peacock to proclaim his debt to Reid: 'He was the most remarkable man I have ever met. He was very learned and I am only too proud to say he taught me all I know, both of the Druid movement and of the Socialist movement.'<sup>53</sup> Smith first came across Macgregor Reid when he came out of the Army in 1919; he promptly joined the Clapham Labour Party, and served on the Executive as Secretary for South Ward until 1930.<sup>54</sup> At some point before June 1938, Smith became the General Secretary of the 'Ancient Order of Druid Hermetists'. In 1938, Smith wrote to the Office of Works requesting permission to celebrate at Stonehenge, and also played a major part in producing the Order's journal, called *The Pendragon*, the first issue of which appeared at Midsummer 1938. The timing suggests that it was designed for distribution at Stonehenge, like the *Druid Journal* before it; and the following year, when he applied for permission on behalf of the AODH's Grand Council, the letterhead bore the same winged-sun symbol that Macgregor Reid had used for *The New Life* 25 years earlier.<sup>55</sup> Here, however, the similarities begin to fade; for the simple reason that Smith, perhaps faced with the indifference or disinterest of George Reid, had found another elderly, eccentric guru for the cause.

This was William George Hooper, who at one time had been considered a physicist of note: his *Aether and Gravitation*, published in 1903, won him a Fellowship of the Royal Astronomical Society. Hooper had been a practising Christian, a volunteer worker for the YMCA and an active member of the Brotherhood Movement, a sort-of working-class equivalent to the Rotary Club. Shocked by what he saw in France during the Great War, he vowed thereafter to 'work, teach and live for peace and fellowship, based on eternal and cosmic principles of Divine Wisdom and Divine Love'. In 1920 he joined the Brotherhood of Healers, a Christian-based faith-healing network founded by the eccentric Brother James Macbeth Bain, hymn-writer and barefoot advocate; and established a 'New Age' centre at Highcliffe on Sea near Bournemouth, a well-heeled strip of Southern England that became something of a centre for occult and mystical activity between the wars.<sup>56</sup>

Smith's Stonehenge speeches, reported in the local press as reliably as Reid's had been, are an interesting fusion of Hooper and Reid.



17 Hermetic interlude. *The Pendragon: Official Organ of the Ancient Order of Druid Hermetists*, Midsummer 1939.

Celebrating the ‘Rites of Caevron’ at the ‘Double Circle’ in 1943, to an audience of over 200, he claimed that

The Druids’ inspiration, passing from out of the deepest antiquity, causes the Druid to dedicate his power to the unseen, to the spirit of beauty, of wisdom and of universal love. Thus inspired, the Druid sees the coming of a New Age . . . when men will have lost that terrible prerogative we have so long used for cruelty and wrong towards those who are weaker than himself.<sup>57</sup>

The 1943 service was not held at the Stones themselves because Smith’s party had apparently once more declined to pay the Office of Works entry fee. In 1946, he requested – and was granted – permission to use the Stones for what was described as the Festival of the Summer Solstice, and the following year arranged to hold a memorial service to Reid on the afternoon of 22 June, at which the BBC was present.<sup>58</sup> Smith was making

changes, seeking to open the organization up, endeavouring to underpin the Druids' cause with the symptoms of a more conventional organization. New lodge names appeared, and at the 1948 solstice, he announced that 'the combined Order intends to embark on widespread teaching of pure Druid science and philosophy throughout the British Isles'.<sup>59</sup>

George Smith clearly had the blessings of George Macgregor Reid in his endeavours: he had both the letterhead and the seal, as he told the Office of Works.<sup>60</sup> He and Peacock between them had inherited Macgregor Reid's mission. Reid's son, Robert, however, was none too impressed with the way things had turned out. His father's faithful and devoted follower for much of his life, at some point they fell out, and Robert was cut out of his father's Will completely. He didn't even have the right to call himself Chosen Chief. Although Smith himself was careful to call himself 'Secretary', the title of Chief was bestowed on him by Macgregor Reid senior because he considered his son 'to lack both philosophic depth and leadership'.<sup>61</sup> It seems that some of his father's former Druids considered that he'd been hard done by. Robert had obviously taken part in AODH activities, since in 1947 he resigned from it; and he took several members with him.<sup>62</sup> Someone close to Robert later said that he had been given 'a Mandate to carry on the Druid order' by one Harry Chadwick, 'the last extant member' of Macgregor Reid's Universal Bond Council, and a meeting was duly held at Leamington in November 1949, which confirmed Robert Macgregor Reid as Chosen Chief.<sup>63</sup>

Smith and his party refused to acknowledge the 'coup', and for several years thereafter two groups of Druids, both claiming the legitimacy bestowed by George Watson Reid's precedent, were petitioning the Office of Works for the right to hold the dawn service at the Stonehenge solstice. In 1953, officials of the Office of Works debated the issue, and in the end they found for 'the older group', by which they meant the one led by the well-known name of Macgregor Reid.<sup>64</sup> Having to accept the 'authority of the earth' to arbitrate in matters of Druidic legitimacy was a humiliating moment. When the solstices became riotous during the 1950s the Druids, formerly the scourge of authority, became dependent on such earthy authorities as policemen in order to hold their services at all.<sup>65</sup>

### The Power to Pronounce

Stonehenge, one of the world's most famous archaeological sites, is also one of the most contested.<sup>66</sup> The history of its management is perhaps

the defining example of the way in which archaeological authority has been exercised in the world beyond the academics' grove; and it demonstrates the very close links between disciplinary authority and legal authority, between intellectual property and property of other kinds.

Chris Chippindale's account of Stonehenge in the nineteenth century reveals that the landowner, Sir Edmund Antrobus (the third baronet), had a marked antipathy to officialdom of all kinds, and would tolerate neither police, nor ancient monuments inspectors, nor archaeologists on his land. The public were free to come and go; and if there were no restrictions on their activities – souvenir-hunting, for instance – there were also no restrictions on the availability of information about the site: Henry Browne and his children published nine editions of his antediluvian speculations between 1823 and 1871, on sale at the Stones, where they acted as informal caretakers.<sup>67</sup>

When the fourth baronet (another Edmund) failed to blackmail the government into buying the site, he enclosed it and charged for admission. His right to do so was upheld in the High Court, on the grounds that a landowner had every right to exclude the public from his private property.<sup>68</sup> In 1918, the government inherited not only the site, but the fence; and the right to control and charge for access, which they have, controversially but lucratively, retained ever since. The Office of Works empowered the Society of Antiquaries to excavate the site and heeded their counsel over the burials issue: a relationship facilitated by the prominent role of Charles Peers and, formerly, Lord Crawford in both organizations. It was not, however, willing to acknowledge any religious vocation for the site as claimed by the Druids, whose 'absurd and degrading nonsense' was tolerated with bad grace.

The government also maintained the right to official interpretation: the only guide-book on sale at the site was that produced by Frank Stevens, the Curator of Salisbury Museum, and also a prominent member of the WANHS known for his lack of sympathy for the latter-day Druids. Evenhandedly, the Office of Works refused to sell either WANHS publications or the *Druid Journal*, but it is easy to see why the Druids were unconvinced. Henry Browne's days were long gone; there was now an 'official line' on the meaning and interpretation of Stonehenge.

The Druids were not alone in their dislike of this closing down of meaning. The artist John Piper contrasted the terse reductionism of the official guide-book with the exuberance of earlier visitors such as the eighteenth-century antiquarian William Stukeley, who according to Piper had 'tumbled over himself with imagery and delightful assertions'.



He declared himself disgruntled with the way the site had been commodified:

Today we are permitted to call Stonehenge beautiful and ugly at will, but we are warned that it is not the point about it; we refer to its atmosphere of worship at our own risk, on the same terms as we leave our car in the car-park; but if we make a guess about its date and about who built it and why, and if these guesses do not add up to an arid, 'Megalithic, for an unknown purpose,' then we are drunk and disorderly.<sup>69</sup>

### The Druid Takeover

To enclosure both physical and epistemic, the Druids mounted a serious challenge. Although Wheeler, Kendrick and Engleheart strove to deprive the solstice of legitimacy, the public attended in steadily increasing numbers throughout the 1920s, and (literally) went out of their way to attend the Druid services. By the 1930s, the Druids had become synonymous with the solstice; and yet the Druid presence at Stonehenge barely antedated the Great War. A tradition had been established, whose origins were wilfully lost in the mists of time, not only by the protagonists themselves, but by the wistfully uncritical journalists who reported their goings-on: indeed, the scorn with which the London papers treated the 'burial issue' is in marked contrast to the annual reports on the solstice in the local press, whose journalists were presumably privy to local informants who could have demolished the Druids' claims, and yet chose to endorse them instead. George Long included the solstice celebration in his *Folklore Calendar*, even though he was sceptical about the Druid's historical claims: 'they deserve a place in this work by reason of so picturesque a ceremony on so historic a site'.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps the local press was similarly motivated.

The popularity of the solstice doubtless owed much to a widespread desire for colour, for mystery and for diversion at a time of growing social unease; and for the same reason the Druids' claims to the antiquity of their religion may have been reassuring. The desire for some sort of encounter with ancient religion, however, did not translate into a massive membership increase for the ADUB; nor did they expect it to. 'Druidism is not likely to become strong in a numerical sense, since few now care to devote themselves to a course of study that has nothing in common with Jazz, Talkies or Cocktails', railed the *Druid Journal* in 1929 (Reid

was prone to damning imprecations upon the propensity of visitors to get drunk, or to listen to 'jazz'<sup>71</sup>). For all his populism, it is clear that Reid had strong ideas about what 'the people' ought to want, and the whole 20-year span can even be seen in terms of a 'Druidic takeover' of an anarchically uncontrolled event, in which the role of the temporal powers who controlled the Stones was crucial. Thrown out in 1914 for trying to hold a service, a supporter ejected in 1915 for standing in the wrong place, Chubb's willingness to allow the Druids to hold their service vested Reid with the necessary authority to assume control of the solstice; by 1918, he was already turning visitors into participants by rearranging them around the stone circle. Refusal to pay the modest entrance fees imposed by the Office of Works allowed the Druids to portray themselves as martyrs, and to entice away large proportions of the crowd to a space of their own, where their rights to the monument were rehearsed to sympathetic audiences. The oppressed underdogs, victims of state intolerance and religious persecution, thereby enhanced their status considerably, to the point at which their right to preside over the Solstice rituals was questioned neither by journalists nor, eventually, by the Office of Works itself.