THE ORIGINS OF MODERN DRUIDRY

Professor Ronald Hutton

THE ORDER OF BARDS OVATES & DRUIDS

MOUNT HAEMUS LECTURE FOR THE YEAR 2000

THE MOUNT HAEMUS AWARD

There was already the Bond or circle of Druid fellowship between them, called the Caw, and companions of these several bodies founded the present-day Mount Haemus Grove in 1245.

Now Mount Haemus is a real mountain in the Balkans, and either this or another of the same name was the classical prison of the winds. They were ruled by Aeolus, who let them out as it were on parole for brief periods, otherwise the Earth would be continuously torn with raging tempests. The Aeolian isles off Sicily are also, however, given for this windy prison. It was, whatever the location, the allegorical name for powerful inspiration which lurked beneath the surface.

Ross Nichols, *The Book of Druidry*, p 77

Travel and history are the two great teachers of Space and of Time that give our lives context: breadth and depth, substance and roots. History offers us not only the possibility of understanding the causes of present-day situations, but also a gift which at first may seem nebulous, but which is in fact essential for a truly satisfactory experience of being alive in the world: and that is a sense of context. Without context we are lost – doomed to misunderstanding and superficiality.

Recognising the vital part that history plays within Druidry, and thanks to the generosity of the Order's patroness, the Order is now able to grant a substantial award for original research in Druidism, with particular emphasis on historical research. We have called this scholarship the Mount Haemus Award, after the apocryphal Druid grove of Mt Haemus that was said to have been established near Oxford in 1245.

Philip Carr-Gomm
Chosen Chief
The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids
Alban Eilir 2005

THE ORIGINS OF MODERN DRUIDRY

Professor Ronald Hutton

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to discover why it was that Europeans in general had no interest in Druids for most of the Middle Ages, and yet were hugely enthusiastic about them by the middle of the eighteenth century. In England the timescale is even shorter, because during the 1720s and 1730s the ancient Druids remained shadowy, marginal and unpopular figures in the national imagination, and yet within half a century had become the definitive characters of national prehistory, and celebrated in plays, poems, songs, paintings and garden ornaments. Even more to the point, by the 1780s, from Wales to London, people were starting to found Druid orders in an effort to recover and revive their wisdom. This is a story that has never been told before, and it is hoped that the research embodied in this essay will represent a first step in knowledge of it.

The Origins of Modern Druidry

In Ross Nichols's posthumously-published *Book of Druidry*, edited by John Matthews and Philip Carr-Gomm, there is a section entitled 'How Far Underground?' It considers, among other things, what happened to Druidry in the period between its ancient suppression by the Romans and its replacement by Christianity, and the appearance of modern Druid orders in the late eighteenth century. Whether Ross himself contributed to this history is something not yet clear to me, but a history it was, coherent and confident and designed to provide a complete answer to the question. It repeated the claims, which had been made for hundreds of years, that much Druidic teaching had survived in the works of medieval Irish and Welsh bards, and that much Druidic ritual had been preserved in seasonal folk customs. It also, however, provided an account of a survival of actual Druids, however intermittent, in organised bodies.

These started around the year 800, with a network of alchemists called the Cor Emrys, based mainly in Wales but linked to a group at the city of Oxford. The Cor Emrys

was suppressed in the eleventh century, but its teachings were revived by cells centred on individual Welsh alchemists or poets, until several of these bodies combined to found the Mount Haemus Grove in 1245. There is then an apparent gap until, in 1694 or just after, the Mount Haemus Grove was revived by the antiquarian John Aubrey. One of his group was the fiery young Irish radical, John Toland, who went on in 1717 to combine ten different groves, from all over the British Isles, into a formal order. Toland was its first chief, and when he died in 1722 he was succeeded by the great scholar William Stukeley. From them proceded the unbroken line of Chosen Chiefs, stretching down for more than two hundred years, of what became known as the Order of the Universal Bond, or just the Druid Order. It culminated in Robert MacGregor Reid, who died in 1964. Ross clearly felt that he should have been the next chief, and, when the election went against him he seceded to found OBOD, which he regarded as firmly and legitimately in the same historical succession.

On recounting this history Ross Nichols stated that it had come to him through the secret teachings of his order. He added that the existence of the order had been a secret in itself until the twentieth century, and accordingly he did not feel obliged to provide any source references or historical evidence for his claims. It seems fairly certain that he did not develop the latter himself, for the legendary history that he recounts is still asserted by the Druid Order from which OBOD seceded. It is an institutional view of the Druid past. It would be easy to say that it is rejected by all professional historians, but that would be untrue in the sense that very few academics have ever read the *Book of Druidry* and so virtually all of them are simply unaware of it. I can only say that I have never myself read any work of history by an academic scholar that confirms any of it.

I am not myself expert enough in medieval alchemy to comment on the information concerning the Cor Emrys. I do, however, know that around the year 800 Oxford itself barely existed. The mythical history expounded by Ross Nichols was explicitly bound up with an early modern legend, which lingered in some quarters into the nineteenth century, and which he apparently believed: that Oxford University was founded by Alfred the Great. In reality, it developed three hundred years after his time. As for the Mount Haemus Grove of 1245, I am simply baffled. The only historical connection between Druidry and Mount Haemus that I can discover comes from the mid-eighteenth century, when William Stukeley wrote letters describing himself as 'a Druid of the Grove of Mount Haemus'. All that he meant by this was that he was one of a group of friends who met at his house on a hill in the Highgate area near London which, because of its windy position, was nicknamed by them after the mountain in Greek mythology which was the

home of the winds. His letters were published in the nineteenth century, and may somehow have become the basis for a myth involving the Middle Ages and John Aubrey.

With Aubrey himself, John Toland and William Stukeley, I am on more familiar ground, which I have now investigated in detail. There are three problems with the story about how between them they founded the Druid Order. The first is that there is absolutely no evidence for it. The second is that this is not for lack of information, because all three men left masses of records concerning their activities, ideas and friendships in the years concerned, and in general. Aubrey's papers are in the Bodleian Library, Toland's in the British Library, and Stukeley's practically everywhere. The third problem is that this huge body of source material shows that all three were most unlikely figures as founders or chiefs of Druid orders. Aubrey was interested in ancient monuments, but devoted little time to Druids themselves. Toland was certainly interested in the ancient Druids, but didn't much like them. Stukeley, by contrast, was besotted with them and very much wanted to be one, but the key to his career, as I shall explain, was that he found himself completely alone in that wish.

The true history of the Druid revival, therefore, seems to begin, technically, with the foundation of the Ancient Order of Druids in London in 1781. What this means is that a careful perusal of the evidence, of a sort never made before, powerfully reinforces the impression that Ross Nichols's account of the origins of the modern Druidic revival is a sectarian myth. That conclusion, however, leaves us with an obvious and wide-open question: in that case why was there a revival and whence did it come?

On the face of things there is a major historical puzzle here, which historians have never systematically faced. In the Middle Ages, Druids had a major presence in Irish literature, being built into the heroic tales and saints' lives that represented the national memory of Ireland's past. Everywhere else in Europe, including Britain, they had almost totally disappeared from the remembered past. There are a few possible references to them in Welsh poems, over which linguists still argue. Occasionally a Continental scholar would refer in passing to one of the ancient Greek or Roman texts that included them. In general, however, the Middle Ages just didn't have a use for them. They did not promote the glory of Christendom, nor the claims of royal or noble families, or of towns and monasteries. They didn't even function particularly well as hate-figures, having nothing particularly exotic or demonic about them. There was simply no point in writing about them.

This was still very much the situation in the year 1480. Within three centuries, however, it had altered completely and, it seems, permanently. All over north-western

Europe, the Druids were regarded as heroic or demonic ancestors. They had become absolutely central to concepts of European prehistory and were major characters in works of history and creative literature alike. Nowhere had all this become more true than in Britain, and especially in its least Celtic portion, England, where fascination had reached the point at which modern people were prepared to call themselves Druids and form themselves into permanent societies to act out the role. The issue, therefore, is not that the first recorded Druid order was founded in 1781, but that by 1781 some English people were determined to be Druids. Only sixty years before, William Stukeley could not find anybody to join him in being one, and only three hundred years before, most people had never even heard of them.

What needs to be explained is that development. It is a story which has never been told before today, and it is one with a peculiar twist. Having started out by stating why I think that Ross Nichol's potted history was absolutely wrong, I am now going to explain why, in some symbolic respects, his account was actually correct. He had all the basic materials of the true story, but they need to be rearranged into a different pattern. So let's now put the story together.

The European interest in Druids awoke as part of the transition from the Middle Ages to the early modern era, in that phenomenon which we call, though now with some controversy, the Renaissance. Part of that phenomenon was a new sense of national identity, held together by a new interest in national pasts, defined by common languages and cultures. First off the mark in using the Druids for this purpose were, ridiculously, the Germans. I call it ridiculous because if there was one thing on which the ancient writers had agreed about Druids, it was that the Germans didn't have them. By the 1490s, however, the cultural running in Germany was being made largely by Rhinelanders. Whereas the Romans had decided that Germany began east of the Rhine, by the end of the Middle Ages the German-speaking area had long been extended to include the entire valley, with large areas that had once been part of the ancient region of Gaul: and Gaul had been the classic land of Druids. Furthermore the Germans were very well aware, both that they had achieved huge economic wealth and cultural sophistication, and that Mediterranean Europeans, and especially the Italians, still regarded them as barbarians in the style of the classical writers.

As the Druids happened to be the only northerners who had impressed the Greeks and Romans with their learning, it was now essential for the Germans to have them. In the years on either side of 1500 a set of Rhinelanders began to extol Druids as the

ancestors of German civilization, and to portray them as having been wise, pious, and proto-Christian. These Renaissance writers cheerfully referred to themselves as Druids. They got round the historical problem by declaring cheerfully that when the Romans banned Druidry in Gaul, its practitioners had all just moved across the Rhine to the free German tribes, who had welcomed them with open arms and kept them for good. There was not, of course, a shred of actual evidence for this, but as many an author has found before or since, if you claim something for which there is no evidence, it is impossible positively to disprove it.

The idea of the Druids as national ancestors proved very popular in Germany, and within ten years the French had woken up to the fact that the Germans had just engaged in a piece of large-scale cultural larceny. The kingdom of France, of course, now covered most of the area that had been occupied by ancient Gaul. As soon as the Germans made Druids worth having, the French wanted them back, with a vengeance. They were aided in this work by an Italian friar called Annius of Viterbo, who stunned the scholarly world in 1498 by launching upon it an edition of hitherto unknown texts by classical writers. They were unknown because they had all just been forged, almost certainly by Annius himself. What they did was to fill in the history of northern Europe between the Book of Genesis and the coming of the Romans, which had hitherto been a complete blank. They did so, moreover, with wise and kindly kings, who sponsored a sophisticated civilization in what became Germany, France and Britain, led by Druids and bards, who taught people like the Greeks all that they knew. This was, of course, exactly what the contemporary Germans and French wanted to hear, and they pounced on it. Annius's revelations made his reputation in his own country as well, and he duly received the wages of sin, by being made a secretary to the Pope. Unfortunately for him, the Pope concerned was Roderigo Borgia, whose court was one of the most dangerous places on the planet. Within a short time he was dead, allegedly by poison.

His work, however, lived on, in a fantastic flowering of French pseudo-history in which the Druids had pride of place. Much of it came to centre on Chartres. Julius Caesar had said, famously, that once a year all the Gallic Druids had assembled at a place in the territory of a tribe called the Carnutes. Chartres was indeed in the territory concerned. There was nothing else to prove that it had been the place to which Caesar referred, but it had become the site of a world-famous medieval cathedral school, which was now anxious to cash in on the growing reputation of Druidry. As a result, for the next two hundred years, French scholars informed the world that the Druids had been the most learned, pious and

admirable people in the entire ancient world, and had predicted the coming of Jesus Christ to a degree that had failed even the Hebrew prophets. There was just one teeny problem with all this, and that was that Caesar had also stated, categorically, that Druidry had originally come from Britain, Many of these French authors, therefore, were also looking nervously over their shoulders, wondering when their traditional rivals, the English, were going to wake up to what they were missing, and cash in. The English, however, did not.

Part of the reason for this lay in the complicated pattern of ethnicity and nationalism that divided the British Isles. The kingdom in them which had traditionally made the strongest links with France was that of Scotland. From the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries the Scots had regularly discovered that an alliance with the French was a promising way to make life hard for the English. As a result there were a number of Scottish scholars studying in Paris when the French were getting drunk on Druidry, and one of them, Hector Boece, brought the Druids home with him. This was a period in which the Scots were going in for some uninhibited historical mythologizing of their own, involving the invention of scores of non-existent kings. Boece wrote a national history which incorporated all of them and added further patriotic fictions, including a declaration that the Druids had acted as a learned pagan clergy serving Scotland in the manner of the later medieval Catholic Church. He also engaged in a bit of scholarly larceny of his own, by stealing the island of Mona from the Welsh. The Roman historian Tacitus was commonly interpreted as stating that this place had been a great centre of Druidry. His description makes it certain that he was talking about the great Welsh island known in English as Anglesey. Boece declared that Tacitus had been talking about the Isle of Man, which was historically part of Scotland, and seated his Scottish Druidic archbishop there. He also went an extra mile in becoming the first person in Britain to associate the Druids with the prehistoric stone circles that survived in many regions, and to declare that they had been temples of the national pagan religion. All this made Druids established and respected features of Scottish history for the next two hundred years.

The Scots, however, were alone in their enthusiasm. The Welsh should have shared it. After all, they had a better claim to be the true heirs of the ancient British, because they were directly descended from them in both language and blood, they had the real island of Mona, and they were involved in a boom in history-writing of their own. That history was, however, centred on the medieval bards, who had defined their national identity in the course of resistance to the English. They didn't need the Druids, who seemed much more remote, supranational, ambivalently attractive, and mysterious. As late as the

1690s a prominent Welsh poet, Henry Vaughan, could answer an enquiry by stating that as the Druids had left no writings, we could know nothing real about them, and that there was no reason to suppose that they had anything to do with the later bards.

The Irish, of course, had never ceased to write about Druids, and did not do so in the early modern period, but their treatment of them had always been double-edged. For every epic that portrayed them as advisers to heroes, there was a saint's life which showed them as the mortal enemies of Christianity. It was this latter, hostile, tradition that got sucked into the great renewal of Irish Catholicism which occurred in the face of the English conquest of the Elizabethan and early Stuart period. In the histories of the Irish Counter-Reformation, Druids featured as the ancestors whom Ireland had needed to lose: savage heathen priests steeped in gloom and gore.

All this left the Tudor English in a muddle of ignorance and doubt. That the French and Scots were keen on something was in itself good reason for the English to have doubts about it. In this context the Druids could look as suspect as haggis or garlic. They may also, however, simply have been unlucky. By sheer chance, the first three authors to deal with them in England were, successively, an Italian with a contempt for ancient Britain, a madman, and an early Protestant who decided to turn them into prototypes of all that he hated most about Catholic clergy. For whatever complex of reasons, nearly a hundred years passed before English historians took them on properly, but then they were pressed into service by the great rewriting of national history which occurred in the later part of the reign of Elizabeth.

Druids promptly appeared in both of the key works of this rewriting, which were produced for very different audiences with very different aims. One was Holinshed's "Chronicles", a multi-volume patriotic history designed for a not very discerning English audience. It is most famous as the main source used for Shakespeare's history plays. It was more concerned with inspiring the newly Protestant English with a sense of historical mission than with matters like source analysis, and so it simply cobbled together the fantasies of Annius and Boece with the writings of Greek and Roman authors. Now, the basic problem for anybody writing about the ancient Druids, for the last half a millennium, is that the picture presented by the Greek and Roman writers is full of contrasts. Some of them portrayed Druids as great scholars, scientists and philosophers, worthy of admiration. Others characterized them as bloodthirsty barbarians, who had to be wiped out as part of any serious civilizing mission. Others still described them as both: as spiritual leaders who

held some interesting opinions and made a serious study of the natural world, but happened to be addicted to icky practices like human sacrifice.

As a result, the team of writers led by Holinshed could only make sense of the Druids by telling a story of degeneration. It started with the wise and pious people who appear in Annius and Boece, and described how they gradually became corrupted, to emerge into historical times as the bloodstained witch doctors who feature in the more hostile ancient sources. Anybody whose fundamental text was the Bible was going to recognise this pattern, because the Old Testament makes clear that human nature is such that any godly people, left to their own devices long enough, are going to turn into idol-worshipping heathens engaging in debauchery and abomination. God then clobbers them and pure religion is briefly renewed. This way of looking at the world had a particular resonance, however, for Protestants, who used it to represent themselves as the latest godly renewal after the long corruption of medieval Catholicism. By this scheme, the Druids became the phase of corruption before the coming of Christianity, and according to God's scheme were removed by the triumph of the latter, which in turn degenerated into Catholicism.

There was, however, another way of looking at them, which was represented by the other great work of Elizabethan history-writing, the Britannia of William Camden. This was designed for a learned international audience, and applied the highest standards of scholarship. When dealing with ancient history it had no truck with writers like Annius and Boece, and used only the Greek and Roman texts. Here Camden hit the same problem, of the contrasting images presented of Druids, and he dealt with it as the Germans and French had generally done, by preferring those authors who said nice things about them. Ironically for such a meticulous scholar, he then added a gross error of his own. His Latin seems, like that of most educated Elizabethans, to have been much better than his Greek, and he misread a passage in a Greek text by a Christian author called Origen. This he translated, completely wrongly, as saying that the British believed in one God before the coming of Christianity; which enabled him to suggest both that the Druids were priests of a true and wholesome religion, unlike the Greek and Roman pagans, and that they had prepared the British to accept the still better religion of Christ.

Thanks to Holinshed and Camden, therefore, the Druids at last arrived in the consciousness of the English, by the opening of the seventeenth century. It was by no means clear, however, what they were doing there and whether they should be welcome. Were they ancestors of whom people should be proud, and who laid the foundations of later

English achievements in religion and learning, or did they represent all the worst aspects of primitivism and savagery, from which England had broken free long ago? It is significant that Shakespeare never put them into his plays. After all, Holinshed was the main source for most of his historical data and he wrote a drama, Cymbeline, which was actually set in ancient Britain. His instinct as a master playwright seems to have told him that Druids simply wouldn't be crowd-pleasers. The first dramatist actually to put them onto the London stage was Henry Fletcher, sometime in the 1610s, and he made a complete hash of it. In his blood and thunder melodrama about Boudica's rebellion, he got Druids totally mixed up with bards, and made them singers of the deeds of dead heroes. There was not much better understanding at the highest level of national theatre, the royal masques. When Thomas Carew wrote one of these for Charles 1 in 1633, he vaguely personified the spirit of ancient Britain in (and I quote) 'a chorus of Druids and rivers'.

At times two writers could take different views of them in the same book. Michael Drayton wrote a volume of poetry about Britain in 1612, in which he described Druids as evil magicians. His friend John Selden then provided historical notes to it in which he hailed them as the founders of English learning and liberty. Individual writers could also change their minds dramatically on the subject, a classic case being John Milton. In his early books he lauded Druids as the ancestors of the English tradition of scholarship. Then, unfortunately, he read some ancient Roman texts about them for himself and was appalled by what he found. In his next publication he denounced them as 'a barbarous and lunatic rout', and after that he never referred to them again. Worse came as the century wore on, and more and more scholars began to have doubts about the histories written by Annius and Boece. As they were the recent authors most favourable to the Druids, the latter began to be contaminated by association. It is not surprising, therefore, that they arrived in the middle of the seventeenth century surrounded by the same mixture of confusion, suspicion and marginalization in which they had entered it. In a history of English science published in 1652, Elias Ashmole, founder of the Oxford university museum, dismissed them with the telling phrase 'the famous and mysterious Druids'.

All this was to change, and, this being England, it did so because of a madman and an eccentric. The former was a young man called Henry Jacob, who became one of the first experts in philology at Oxford University. It is now my considered opinion that human beings can prove almost anything, in theory, by using either philology or statistics. Jacob used linguistic analysis to prove such things as that Hercules and Joshua had been the same person and - in passing - that the Druids had been taught by Abraham and brought his true

religion to Britain. He then had the integrity to go completely and permanently crazy, but his ideas were stolen and published years later by a fellow don at his college. The book came out in 1655, and it was duly imitated by other Oxford philologists in the next quarter of a century. They used a massive amount of linguistic learning to develop its point that the Druids were the true heirs of Abraham, so opening up an apparent route to them straight out of the Old Testament which avoided all the fictitious kings of Annius and Boece. In the process they gave them a new dignity and importance.

So note. The tradition that Ross Nichols reported may have no historical reality in itself, but one of its component parts actually has some reality: the central importance to our story of Oxford University.

Another of Ross's components began to fall into place in January 1649, as Cromwell and his comrades in the English Revolution set about the trial and execution of King Charles 1, and the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. Down in Wiltshire, a group of royalist nobles and gentry met at Marlborough, almost certainly to discuss possible reactions to the crisis. In the end, they clearly decided that the most sensible reaction was to do absolutely nothing, and went home. Their discussions, however, took several days, and on one of those they decided to go on a hare-hunt, and that did change the history of Britain. One of their number was a young squire called John Aubrey, and when the hunt ran through the village of Avebury, he dropped out to look at the great standing stones there. The locals, it seemed, shared the general opinion that they were natural. To Aubrey they seemed to form circles and an avenue, and so to be made by human hands.

In later years he went back there to study them, and became convinced that he was looking at a huge ancient monument. When the monarchy and the Lords returned together in 1660, Aubrey became a member of the newly-founded Royal Society, to promote English science. He introduced it to his discovery at Avebury, and drew the attention of two Scottish members, who told him about the stone circles of their own country and their association with the Druids, which had by then been made by Scottish scholars for about a hundred and forty years. This seems to have opened his eyes to the existence of a huge, hitherto unsuspected, complex of megalithic monuments scattered across the British Isles, the range of which meant that they could logically only be prehistoric. Stonehenge, hitherto thought to be unique and to be Roman or post-Roman in date, was suddenly revealed to him to be only the most remarkable of these. In 1665 he drafted a book to present this case. He had, in fact, produced an intellectual hand-grenade, a

wonderful work of scholarly polemic that was both well illustrated and well argued, but having written it he lost his nerve, and decided that he needed more evidence.

The hard truth is that Aubrey was incapable of finishing a book, in the normal sense of the expression. What he could do was compulsively jot down notes on a range of different subjects. In 1665 he had written a best-seller by accident, but then began to tinker with it. Thirty years later he had succeeded in turning his brilliant, tight polemic into a huge and shapeless mass of jottings, filling two volumes, that no publisher would take. That is where things might have rested, had Oxford not come to his rescue. It was his old university, and as bad luck and general unworldliness turned him into a homeless bankrupt, dependent on friends for board and lodging, it became one of the places which he haunted, chatting about his ideas. One of those who heard them was a brilliant young don called Edmund Gibson, who decided in 1692 to edit a completely revised and enlarged edition of Camden's Elizabethan classic, the Britannia, incorporating all the discoveries in history and archaeology that had been made in the century in between. He assembled a team of other young Oxford scholars to carry out the job, giving them different bits of the British Isles on which to work, and also hired various consultants, one of whom was the now aged and sickly Aubrey.

This is the historical reality behind Ross Nichols's story of the refoundation of a Mount Haemus Grove at Oxford in these years. The people concerned were not gathered round Aubrey, but Gibson, and they were not interested in being Druids, or even very interested in Druids at all, but they did make a decisive contribution to the story of Druidry. Some of them were persuaded by Aubrey's revelation of the extent and importance of Britain's prehistoric heritage, expressed mostly through megalithic monuments, and it was natural - as Aubrey did - to attribute these to the only native prehistoric priests whom history had ever noticed, the Druids. They made an effort to get Aubrey's own book on the subject published at last, but failed because, as said, he had rendered it unpublishable. What they did instead was to advertize his ideas to the public in the revised Britannia, which appeared in 1695. It was a best-seller, becoming a standard reference work for the educated British, and brought home to them the concept that the Druids were rooted in the English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish landscape, expressed through magnificent stone monuments of which the modern British could feel proud, as part of their heritage and which they could now study properly.

This idea could not have come at a better political moment, because it was when the British Isles were being drawn together into a superstate dominated by England. In 1691

Ireland was placed firmly under the rule of Protestants of English descent who looked to the mother country for support. In 1707 Scotland formally united with England as a single state with one government and Parliament. One of the problems of this new nation was that there was no obvious history to support it. The historical memories of its modern peoples had been formed largely in conflict with each other, and their heroes, from Cú Chulainn, Alfred the Great and William the Conqueror, to Edward 1, Robert the Bruce and Owen Glendower, had won their glory in what now looked like civil wars. Suddenly, the hitherto unregarded Druids seemed to provide a genuinely impressive common past, expressed in great and enduring structures of stone, for which major claims of learning and piety could be made. Hitherto Druids had been consigned vaguely to woods, groves and caves, the places in which the ancient authors had located them. Now they were associated dramatically with a surviving, and extensive, sacred landscape.

It also mattered that, for the first time, people were able to visualize the Druids themselves. One of their great traditional weaknesses in the historical imagination had been that there were no ancient pictures of them, to transform them into icons of art and literature. This had now been remedied by a London lawyer called Aylett Sammes, who published in 1676 a spectacularly illustrated history of early Britain. He solved the problem of how to portray Druids by bringing in help from the Germans. Back in the 1500s one of these, a poet, had described some statues that he had seen in a monastery enclosure in Bavaria, as ancient images of Druids. There is actually no reason whatever to believe that they were: from the description they sound like Roman or medieval figures of Greek philosophers. Sammes, however, was not going to look a gift horse in the mouth, and duly had a picture drawn that exactly followed the descriptions. It showed an elderly man with a long beard, in a hooded cloak and robe, carrying a staff and wearing an expression at once genteel, wise and compassionate. This was reproduced again and again in publications during the next hundred years. It fixed, for ever, not just the enduring image of a Druid in western culture, but through it, and in the nineteenth century, that of a wizard. A direct line of descent runs from Aylett Sammes's book to Tolkien's Gandalf.

All the conditions were now in place for the rebirth of Druidry into the modern British consciousness. The trouble is that a birth commonly occurs more easily and effectively if it has a midwife present, and it was by no means clear who the midwife was to be in this case. Gibson and most of his friends were not interested in the job, and Aubrey had not been up to it. A number of other candidates swiftly lined up for the role, of whom the most talented and influential happened to be John Toland, the man named by Ross as

the first Chosen Chief of the Druid Order. Once again, you see how history and legend run in parallel courses. Toland beat the others because he was the best writer among them, and was also the most ambitious, the most notorious, and the most radical. He had been among the consultants engaged by Gibson for the Britannia, met Aubrey personally in Oxford, and been persuaded by his ideas. Like the whole of this first generation of would-be publicists for Druids, however, Toland had serious disadvantages. For one thing, none of them were English, and England happened to be the dominant partner and the centre of cultural fashion as well as politics in the new British superstate. The people who wrote about the importance of Druids in the wake of the new edition of the Britannia were all from the Celtic lands of the archipelago: two Welshmen, a Highland Scot, and Toland himself, who was a Gaelic Irishman by birth and upbringing. They were using Druids to bring the importance of their own cultures to the attention of the English and Lowland Scots, and this tended to have the effect of keeping the Druids seeming marginal and alien.

Furthermore, they were also unlucky, in that they all died before they could make a sustained impact. Toland himself never actually found a sponsor for his intended book on Druids. All that he actually wrote about them was the prospectus for what he wanted to put in it, which was published after his death. By the 1720s and 1730s, therefore, the transformation in national consciousness had still not occurred. What was needed was somebody who was English, and well-connected, and who possessed both a personal enthusiasm for Druids and long life, good health and intellectual stamina. Enter Dr William Stukeley, symbolically the second of Ross's Chosen Chiefs.

Stukeley was a medical doctor, and initially a natural scientist, dedicated to understanding how the physical world worked and a devoted disciple of Sir Isaac Newton. He was also, however, a mystic, with a powerful sense of the immanence of divinity in creation and of the interconnectedness of all things, and a yearning for personal union with the divine. As such, the writings that made him drunk were those of the Neoplatonist philosophers of late pagan antiquity, who had shared the same aim and had the same sense of how the cosmos worked. He became John Aubrey's last pupil, in the sense that, twenty years after Aubrey's death, Stukeley was lent a copy of the old man's unpublished manuscript. It opened his eyes to the existence and importance of megaliths, and especially those of Avebury, and fired him with a new enthusiasm. He became determined to make proper surveys of the greatest of these monuments, with the aim of rediscovering the earliest religion of humanity. From what I have said of statistics, it should surprise nobody that after surveying feverishly all through the early 1720s, he discovered that these

prehistoric temples exactly reflected his own Neoplatonist faith. They formed, with what he held to be uncanny precision, a huge representation in stone of the Neoplatonic concept of deity. Aubrey's work has convinced him that they had been designed by Druids, who thus automatically got adopted as the priests of his ideal ancient religion.

He became, in fact, the first modern person to identify himself completely with them and to take the name of Druid. In the mid 1720s he drafted a set of books to prove his case, which, had they been published, would have been astonishingly radical for their time. They preached, boldly, a pagan religion embodied in the old monuments which was actually valid, and reflected cosmic truths. He could not, however, persuade his aristocratic friends to sponsor them, and seemed to find nobody else willing to take his Druidic faith seriously. As a result he ended up stranded in the late 1720s, sulking in a lonely part in Lincolnshire with a failing medical practice. The fact that he had redesigned his back garden as a Druid temple was of only temporary comfort to him. It was in this predicament, in 1729, that he made a dramatic personal conversion back to Christianity, and was promptly rewarded with a comfortable benefice in the Church of England. He repaid it by altering his ideas once again, to adopt the Oxford University theory that the Druids had been missionaries sent by Abraham, and adjusting his views of megalithic monuments to make them (statistically proven) giant predictions of the teachings of Anglican Christianity. He was still in love with Druids, and still thought himself to be one; but like him they had become Christians.

The result, interestingly, was not a tragedy but a roaring success. He took until the early 1740s to publish his research, but he lived long enough to do so. In his two great books, on Stonehenge and Avebury, he convinced the general public, once and for all, that the megalithic remains of the British Isles were the work of the prehistoric British, and not of the Romans, Danes or Merlin. He revealed the complex ritual landscapes around Avebury and Stonehenge, and coined enduring technical terms for classes and aspects of monuments ('cursus', 'trilithon', 'avenue', etc). In addition, he made the Druids respectable and patriotic ancestors, and persuaded many generations of country vicars and gentry that they and their culture were respectable objects of research. After Stukeley the study of prehistoric remains became constant and systematic, and the Druids an accepted part of everybody's mental geography. Having been the only Druid on the planet in 1722, and probably the first 'serious' one for fifteen centuries, he had ensured that they were reappearing all over London sixty years later. The story of this lecture is complete.

As suggested, it does not entirely rescue the traditional history of the Druid order, as repeated by Ross Nichols. In some ways the existence of the latter has served to camouflage reality and possibly even to deter research that might have uncovered more solid data. On the other hand, it may be argued that the role of the Druid is not in fact primarily to carry out historical research, but to extend the traditional work of the Bard, in producing accounts of the past that mirror it in other ways, and that of the Ovate, in reflecting reality through riddles and signs. It could also, however, be suggested that the history of the early Druid revival is now maturing, by passing through the three successive circles of initiation. In the Bardic, it consisted of echoes of historical truths, half-remembered in the general culture of the nation. In the Ovatic, it became the secret teaching of a particular pair of orders, reflecting their identities and foundation myths. Now perhaps it has entered into the Druid grade of its career, by emerging into the public sphere as a properly researched story with references to accessible sources. I do not claim myself to be one of its initiators. I would however, be pleased to be one of the circle that welcomes it as it comes among us, and gives it a hug, others of whom are with me on this Mount Haemus Day.

SOURCE REFERENCES

The material and arguments of this lecture will be found repeated and amplified, and with full individual source references at each point, in chapters 2 and 3 of my book which is due to be published in a few years, *The Druids in Britain*. What will be provided here, therefore, is a 'talking through' guide to the source material, following the order of the lecture. This may be more helpful to the likely readership of this book than a straighforward list of endnotes.

Ross Nichols's *Book of Druidry* was published by the Aquarian Press in 1990. William Stukeley's letters were edited in three volumes by W. C. Lukis for the Surtees Society, between 1882 and 1887. The references to Mount Haemus are in volumes 1 and 3.

The Renaissance German and French love-affair with Druids is examined in Noel L. Brann, 'Conrad Celtis and the "Druid" Abbot Trithemius',

Renaissance and Reformation NS 3.1 (1979), pp. 16-28; Frank L. Borchardt, German Antiquity in Renaissance Myth (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971); T. D. Kendrick, The Druids (London, 1927); R. E. Asher, Nationalist Myths in Renaissance France (Edinburgh University Press, 1993); and D. P. Walker, 'The "Prisca Theologia" in France' Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 17 (1954), pp. 204-59. A classic example of the kind of literature produced in its later stages is Sebastian Rouillard's Parthenie (Paris, 1609).

The edition of Hector Boece's Chronicles that I have used is the 1531 Scots one, edited by R. W. Chambers and Edith Batho for the Scottish Text Society in 1936. Elizabethan Welsh historiography is best represented by Humphrey Llwyd, The History of Cambria (London, 1584), and Cronica Walliae, edited by Ieuan M. Williams (Cardiff University Press, 2002); Sir John Price, Historiae Brytannicae defensio (in British Library, Add. MS 14925); and Maurice Kiffin, Deffyniad Ffydd Eglwys Loegr a Gyfieithwyd I'f Gymraeg, edited by W. P. Williams (Bangor, 1908). The letter from Henry Vaughan is in Bodleian Library, Aubrey MS 12, folio 240. The classic Counter-Reformation Irish history is Geoffrey Keating, The History of Ireland, and his treatment of the Druids is in the 1908 Irish Texts Society edition by Patrick Dinneen. It is missing from other editions of the same work, which is why I am all the more grateful to John and Caitlín Matthews for drawing my attention to this one.

Of the three false starts to the Tudor English treatment of Druids, the Italian was Polydor Vergil, whose English History was edited by Sir Henry Ellis for the Camden Society in 1846. The (eventual) madman was John Leland, whose Commentarii de scriptoribus Britannicis eventually got published in 1709. The Protestant polemicist was John Bale, in The Actes of Englysh Votaryes (2nd edition, London, 1550). I have used the 1807 London reprint of the 2nd, 1586, edition of Ralph Holinshed's Chronicles. For Camden I faced a tougher problem as there are many editions and they are very different from each other, so I have drawn on six, from the original Latin one of 1586 to the English translation of 1610.

Henry Fletcher's Bonduca is in volume 4 of The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon, edited by Fredson Bowers for Cambridge University Press in 1970. Carew's masque is in the edition of his poems by Rhodes Dunlap, published by Oxford University Press in 1949. Michael Drayton's Polyolbion, with John Selden's notes, was edited by J. William Hebel for Blackwell in 1933. Milton was nice about Druids in his poems 'Lycidas' and 'Mansus' and his pamphlets The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce (2nd edition, London, 1644) and Areopagitica, edited in Complete Prose Works of John

Milton by Ernest Sirluck for Yale University Press in 1959. His dramatic change of mind occurred in his History of Great Britain, edited in the Yale Complete Prose Works in 1971. Elias Asmole's cryptic line is in his Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum (London, 1652).

The treatise of poor Henry Jacob was published in Delphi Phoenicizantes by Edmund Dickinson at Oxford in 1655. The classic follow-up Oxford text is Thomas Smith's Syntagma de Druidism Moribus (1664). John Aubrey's letters and papers survive in the several volumes of the Bodleian Library's Aubrey Manuscripts at Oxford. His unpublished work on ancient monuments is, however, in the same library's MSS Gen. Top. c.24-5, and important letters written by him are in its Wood MS F39. The best biography of him is probably still Anthony Powell, John Aubrey and His Friends (London, 1948), but his intellectual life is better analyzed by Michael Hunter, John Aubrey and the Realm of Learning (London: Duckworth, 1975).

The tale of Gibson's revision of Camden's Britannia was told by Stuart Piggott in the Proceedings of the British Academy 37 (1951), pp. 199-217, and again by Graham Parry, in The Trophies of Time: English Antiquarians of the Seventeenth Century (Oxford University Press, 1995), and is chronicled in the Bodleian Library Aubrey and Tanner Manuscripts. Aylett Sammes's book was Britannia Antiqua Illustrata (London, 1676).

Of the would-be publicists for Druids in the wake of the revised Britannia, the Welshmen were Edward Lhuyd and Henry Rowlands, and the Highland Scot was Martin Martin. Lhuyd's preliminary work is in the Britannia itself, but he died before he could follow it up: the nearest thing to a biography is Frank Emery, Edward Lhuyd (University of Wales Press, 1971), though Glyn Daniel published a neat appreciation of his contribution to our understanding of prehistory in the Welsh History Review 3 (1967), pp. 346-8. Rowlands published Mona Antiqua Restaurata in Dublin in 1723 and Martin A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland in London in 1703.

John Toland's characteristically inconsistent and opportunistic views of Druids were published in his Pantheisticon (London, 1720) and (much more extensively) in the posthumous edition of his works by P. Desmaiseaux, A Collection of Several Pieces of Mr John Toland (London, 1726). The letters and papers that tell the story behind them are in the British Library, Add. MSS 4295 and 4465, and both the British and Bodleian Libraries have his annotated copies of Martin's Description of the Western Isles. The context for his attitude to Druids has been studied by Justin Champion, in 'John Toland, the Druids and the Politics of Celtic Scholarship' Irish Historical Studies 32 (2001), pp. 321-9, and Republican Learning (Manchester University Press, 2003); Robert E. Sullivan, in John Toland and the

Deist Controversy (Harvard University Press, 1982), and 'John Toland's Druids', Bullan 4.1 (1998), 19-42; and Alan Harrison, in 'John Toland (1670-1722) and Celtic Studies', in Celtic Languages and Celtic Peoples, edited by Cyril J. Byrne et al. (Halifax University Press, 1992).

William Stukeley's two great publications were Stonehenge (London, 1740) and Abury (London, 1743), and (as said above) a large amount of his correspondence and autobiographical notes was published by the Surtees Society in the nineteenth century. He cannot be understood, however, without a systematic study of the hundreds of unpublished treatises, field notes and letters written by him which are now divided between the Bodleian Library (in the Eng. Misc. Manuscripts and Gough Maps sections), Freemasons' Hall, Cardiff Public Library, the Wellcome Trust Centre, the Society of Antiquaries, Wiltshire Record Office, the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and the Gentlemen's Society of Spalding. The surviving manscripts of his projected work on British prehistory from the 1720s are Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Misc. c. 323, and Cardiff Public Library, MSS 4.26 and 4.253. The last of these, on Stonehenge, is about to be published at last in an edition by Aubrey Burl and Neil Mortimer from Yale University Press. The only biography is still Stuart Piggott's William Stukeley (Thames and Hudson, 1950; 2nd edition, 1985), but its conclusions regarding Stukeley's ideas have been completely overturned by David Boyd Haycock's William Stukeley (Boydell, 2002). I think however, that Haycock misunderstands his religious and antiquarian thought in some respects (while getting him absolutely right on the natural sciences), and that Piggott was actually at times closer to the truth in these areas: and both missed his paganism. I have argued this in a paper, 'The Religion of William Stukeley', which is to be read at the Society of Antiquaries (where Stukeley himself read his own treatises) next year, and at time of writing is being considered for publication in the Antiquaries' Journal.

A Brief Curriculum Vitae

I am Professor of History in the University of Bristol, a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. I have published eleven books on aspects of political, social, cultural and religious history, including a monograph on the English Civil War, a narrative history of the Stuart Restoration, a biography of Charles II, a survey of what is thought about the pagan religions of the ancient British Isles, two large-scale studies of the history of the ritual year in Britain, an analysis of Siberian shamanism and the first history of modern paganism in Britain. I have supervised seven students to the completion of Ph.D. theses and three to the completion of MA dissertations, and acted as an external examiner for thirteen universities in the United Kingdom, Ireland and Australia and an external superviser of postgraduate students at two university colleges. I was formerly a Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, and have been at Bristol since 1981.

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