

# The Compass



## And The Rose

An Introduction into Cochranite and Cochrane-  
influenced Craft

With quotes from Roebuck in the Thicket,  
The Robert Cochrane Letters and  
Joe Wilson's 1734

By T.M. Branwynn

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## Introduction

Greetings, and welcome to [The Compass and the Rose](#). This is a short pamphlet dealing with the Cochranite side of the Spectrum of the movement known as British Traditional Witchcraft.

There are a number of Traditions that make up this 'side of the house' if you will and I will attempt to cover ideas and magical thought from four of them. These are the Clan of Tubal Cain, The Living Myth 1734, Mohsian and the Cosan Tradition. Of the three, the Clan of Tubal Cain is the oldest and original. Cosan is by far the youngest and most closely related to the Mohsian Tradition. The Living Myth: 1734, was founded by Joe Wilson under instruction from Robert Cochrane and later Evan John Jones.

These Traditions all differ from each other in aspects of their derivation and Clan Lore but they all share certain characteristics. It will be my task to attempt to acquaint you with some of these. It is my intention to present, in these few pages, a very basic idea of some Cochranite Concepts and a suggested reading list. I am not going to attempt to teach you 'how to.' I merely wish to introduce you to a bit of 'what.'

The concept of the Living Myth is, perhaps, the most important and the most overlooked aspect of modern paganism and even modern Traditional Witchcraft. A majority of modern neo-pagans learned their "craft," if you will, from sources either ignorant of or unwilling to discuss the existence of Immanent Deity. The idea of intimate personal contact with the Gods of one's Tradition – the Tribal or Little Gods – is therefore alien and more than a little frightening. This in turn creates a situation in which, the would-be witch does not recognize the need for – in some cases, even the existence of – Initiatory Mysteries.

Initiatory Mysteries do not work in the manner that most people are accustomed to having their religion behave; they cannot be codified in a set of hard and fast rules that tell a person when and how to communicate with the Gods within and without. Nor are they are not a set of arbitrary morals intended to solve all of the world's ills.

What they are is a set of metaphoric, symbolic sequences that open the doors to self-transformation and communion with the divine-within for those who resonate with them. We are accustomed in today's culture of mass media, mass-consumption, and instant-gratification consumerism, to accepting one-size-fits-all products. In the World of the Mysteries we find that not everyone resonates to the same keys or sequences. For some people a Coven – or Cuveen - is home-and-family that they would never be without. For others, the very concept may confuse or even frighten. As a culture, we are no longer comfortable with that level of intimacy.

Mystery – that is to say, Mythic Spirituality - is not a pair of athletic shoes to be put on and taken off, bought, traded and sold at whim. It must be experienced completely, correctly and in the correct order by a Proper Person who has been properly prepared.

The point to this early discussion of the concept of Mystery is that Cochraneite Craft is primarily mystical in its approach and tends to work from the Underworld Mysteries outward while the more prevalent Gardnerian Craft works from the Land or Fertility Mysteries inward. The two progressions actually meet and overlap each other in a most interesting fashion that caused, among other things, the evolution of the Mohsian and Cosan Traditions.

We will be returning to all of this later but for now, I wish to offer a table of contents, a sort of roadmap, to the pathways I would like to introduce.

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## The Witches' Compass

Before we tackle an in-depth examination of what the compass does, we need to know what it is. Thus in this section introduction, I intend to examine the Witches' Compass in both its physical and some of its metaphorical forms.

One of the oldest 'places' associated with the practice of the Craft is the Crossroads. We find crossroads mentioned in many magical contexts, from the Miles Cross of 'Tam Lin,' to the Banbury Cross of 'Mother Goose' - itself a fascinating wealth of symbolic lore. Meetings with the Devil take place in the crossroads. Challenges by the False Knight are 'in the road.' So the question is: 'Just what is a crossroads?'

Simply put, a crossroads is a meeting place. South to North meets East to West forming an area with a clearly delineated Center that may be said to partake of not only all directions (all places or realms) but also no place - being where the four cardinal, or four cross directions, meet. (I will go into the uses of the cross directions much later. If we look on a map, we can find a similar figure delineated in the map's legend. This is called 'The Compass Rose' and you may find just such a figure on the cover of this pamphlet. It is from the nature and associations of these two images that we may first draw the basis for our Witches Compass.

Thus we have found that our Compass or our Crossroads has two distinct characteristics: Firstly, it indicates four directions and a center. Secondly, that center is a paradoxical 'between place' that partakes of the natures of all of the directions while being none of them. So we may say that our center is 'All Things,' or 'the meeting point of all realms.' We can see a historic parallel in the Fourth Fifths (Fath, Cath, Fis and Blath) of Ireland and the Middle - Mid, marked by the hill of Tara. Tara, being the center, was all things of ancient Erin and none of them simultaneously. This is a very important concept to remember when dealing with Compass Magic. This is also why the cauldron, the great blending, cooking, transmuting and distilling chamber of the Craft is placed at the center of circles when it is used. This is also why some strains place their Hearthstone at the Center with the Cauldron above it. One look at the historic role of the Hearth in home and hall, along with the Sacred Nature of the hearth fire, tells a voluminous magical story that I do not have space to recount here.

The next item we must consider in the compass form is the Circle. The circle is laid with its diameter a multiple of a specific distance. This may be in feet, short yards, megalithic yards depending on how a specific strain works and what correspondences are invoked. The important thing to recall about the circle is that it is the boundary of magical reality. As the center is all things, so the circle marks the boundary of *nothing*. Beyond it lies Void or the River Styx or the Great Western Sea of the dead. This is one reason that Witches are so very careful about the boundaries of their circle. To breach the circle is to bring into the Clan's

midst the stuff of the Void, unmediated by any filtering agency. This is also one reason for the Black Man's duty as protector of the circle and its border.

So, now we have our Center – 'All Things and No Thing' - and our boundary – 'Nothing and Void.' What, then, of our four directions? This is where we run into some controversy and I will attempt to avoid such myself by clarifying an item that seems to be widely misunderstood.

The Four Directions are sources of Power. They represent four basic principles that combine to form the Magical and Outer Worlds. Alchemists termed these principles 'elements' in the sense that they are the purest metaphoric examples of those things that make up being. In modern thought, this has become confused with the idea that these elements *are* reality instead of metaphors for its parts.

We also know that the Compass Circle incorporates not four, but at least *five* directions – thus leading to the applicability of the Pentagram Riddles in encapsulating information about the circle. Alchemy also posited this fifth essence or 'Quintessence' although it is largely ignored in popular pagan publication and practice that clings, dogmatically, to 'the four elements.' Once again, even the crudest of the original Alchemy disagrees with this attitude. What are posited – most simply and basically – in the Four Directions and Four Realms are not 'elements' but *essences*, that is to say, pure ideas and it is these that we will examine in greater detail in the following sections. To lend some background to further discussion, I offer the following ideas for consideration.

**'Earth'** typifies several different concepts. It is solidity, that is to say 'Form' that is able to receive and house the principle of Force, lending it the dimension of 'shape.' It is considered 'feminine' in that it is a 'receptive' principle rather than an 'active' one. In this perception, the first and best symbol for this Principle is Stone. In the aspect of Stone it may be seen also as the tomb or the grave and thus as a symbol for Fate or Doom. 'Earth' also typifies fertility, describing the fertile, planted fields and orchards that our ancestors and we depend upon for much of our sustenance. It is again feminine in that it receives, houses, and nurtures seed, giving the developing plants both a ready supply of nutrients and a firm medium for their root systems. In this aspect, it may also be viewed as the womb. In this perception, the best symbol for the principle is Land.

Earth also houses or encapsulates the concept of the Underworld. In this perception, the best symbol is the World.

**'Air' or 'Wind'** typifies activity and receptivity causing views of it to vary and contradict. Cochrane saw it as feminine in nature, causing him to view the male principle as hopelessly outnumbered by the more prevalent female. Other thinkers, both modern and not so, have seen it as bi-sexual and finding many different mythological expressions of this nature. My personal favorite is the figure of Hafgan from the First Mabinogi. Wind is the opposing reverse of stone.

It is active, moving and possesses Force but it has not form unless it is contained in something solid. It opposes the solidity of Stone by working upon it the force of erosion, even as Stone deflects it and other solid objects contain it. This opposition is echoed in the 'dignity' system of Tarot where coins and Swords are depicted as opposing suits.

However, wind is also giving, and anything may move it. It responds by flowing aside from propelled solids in a fluid fashion and it becomes excited – as does water – when the 'masculine' principle of fire is applied to it in the form of heat.

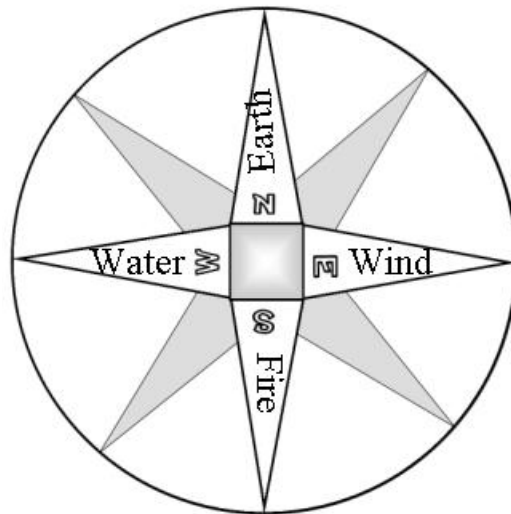
**Flame or Sun** is the only essence that is viewed, on the surface, as entirely masculine. It is comprised of heat and light and consumes both Air and Earth. Wind may fan it to greater heat or deprive it of the heat that it needs to sustain itself, just as Stone may support it and – in the case of coal – fuel it or bury it and deprive it of its needed Air. The reason that I say 'Sun' is that it symbolizes a domain while Fire carries with it another complete set of symbolic meanings. Suffice to say that either one will work for this discussion. The Cauldron may contain Flame – Form housing Force and giving it definition or Flame may boil its contents – form giving Purpose to Force. Sun may be said to be the opposite of Sea or Fire of Water and thus magic is made when the two are brought into interaction. Again, the Tarot echoes this thought by opposing Rods and Cups.

**Seas or Water:** Comprises the final directional essence. The deep symbolism of the Sea as the representative of this realm is literally as vast and unending as the Sea itself. The Sea is receptive, it moves fluidly around Force or Solid Form. It is amorphous – as is Air or Wind – and adopts the shape of any solid container. Like wind, it has its own currents and houses its own Force. Unlike Air or Wind however, water cannot be compressed. It is as dense as it can be and is thus completely true to itself in this respect. It can be agitated by Wind or Fire however and with enough of those two, it can respond explosively as steam. Seawater is comprised of the same stuff as the basis of both blood and amniotic fluid and thus it may be said to represent the nutrients and nurturing aspects of the feminine. It also has a darker side in that it may drown life, put out fire and absorb Air. Thus it embodies the feminine Power of Taking, which is the most forceful aspect of receptivity.

So now, our Compass may be seen as the crossroads – or meeting place – for these four basic essences. At its center, we have the Great Cauldron in which all four are combined and rendered to work magic. At the edge is the circle formed by the River Styx – oblivion. Thus the association with the compass rose on the cover may be seen. But all answers lead to further questions and the next must be 'What do we have to say about the different Compass Constructs and their workings?' Moving on to the next sections, we will begin to address this next step.

## The 'Common' Compass

By 'Common Compass' I refer to the one that has been popularized in pagan writing for the last seventy or so years. This is the Alchemical Circle used by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and by several other esoteric and Mystery Traditions. It is most often characterized as you see below:



Looking at this construct, we can see that the 'opposition' essences are visualized diagonally across from each other. Thus we have an interaction between East and North and South and West. This circle is capable of flowing the magic current of its shape either deosil or widdershins. The quarters may also be aspected to times of day – (starting at East) Dawn, Noon, Dusk and Midnight. It may also be corresponded seasonally, which is where some difficulties have been experienced.

Active Southerly power flows toward the receptive West. Likewise, active/receptive easterly energies flow toward the receptive/active North while Northerly energies (North as the 'House or Vessel of Force') may flow toward East as well. Here the center does not function so much as the cauldron or forge where all four meet and are combined, but rather as a hub upon which, the whole structure turns.

The chief advantage to this circle construct is its universality. It does not need adjustment, at this level of understanding, to work well in any hemisphere of the globe, although at deeper levels of thought both this and the Cochranite Compass do, in fact, require inversion to work their respective Keys correctly in the Southern Hemisphere. This has been a hotly debated idea in earlier times resulting in some bitterness between Witches of the 'mother countries.' In my view, since an important part of the purpose of an organic and living religion is to

facilitate the interfacing of a society with its Land, then when that Land has prevailing currents that differ from 'The Old Country' provisions need to be made accordingly and with the due respect to the Spirits and leys of the 'new' land. Mills worked with this construct are normally paced deosil and no seasonal or solar adjustment is made for the course of the year. More in-depth information on this construct is available from many different sources and so I feel no need to explore it more deeply here.

## The Cochranite Compass

At first glance, the Cochranite Compass would seem to have much in common with the Common Compass. Its directions are aspected differently and according to a different logic but on the outside, much is similar. This is the Compass as worked in the Northern Hemisphere:



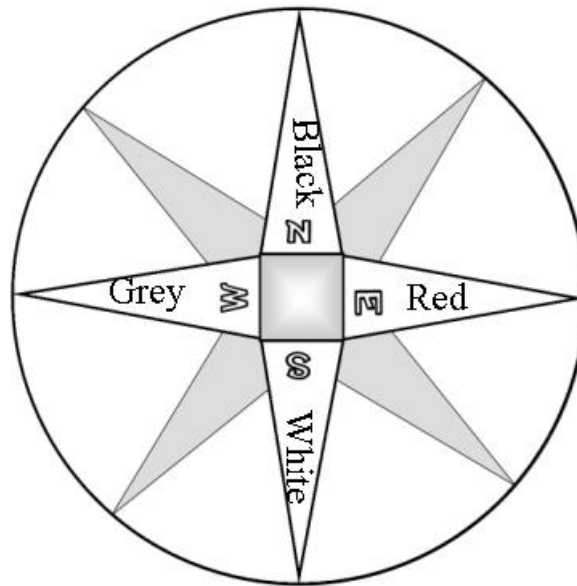
If you notice, the “opposition” essences are placed directly across the compass from each other. When the directions are invoked, they are invoked in pairs, each Cardinal and its opposite. They are also invoked into the center rather than around the perimeter and thus the energies of the four directions are poured directly into the Cauldron to be mixed and worked.

This next diagram is more helpful in understanding the significances of this arrangement:



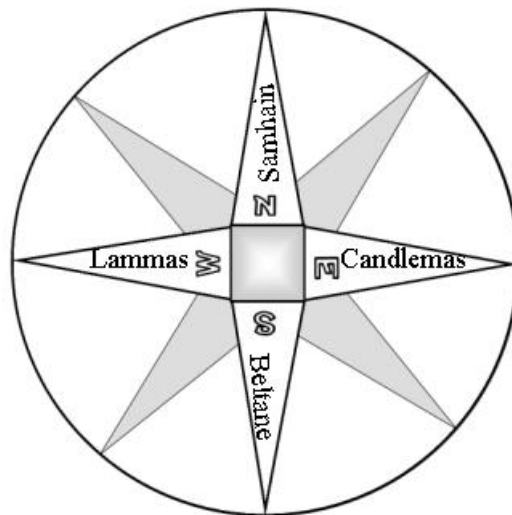
Looking at these associations, we can see that time of day and seasonal associations that connect the compass to the Land Mysteries fall very naturally into place. The winter and midnight of North is associated with the killing North Wind or Airt. East is associated with Dawn and spring. South is seen as fertile summer fields and West is associated with fall and the sun setting into the Sea.

Further information is revealed with the directional colors:

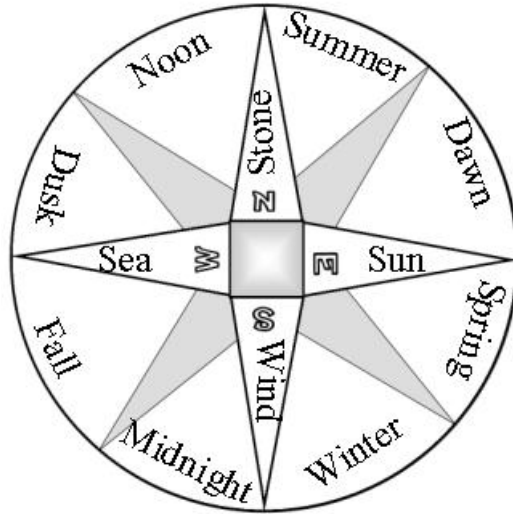


Black stands for midnight, red for dawn, white for the bright heat of noon and grey for the darkening skies of sunset.

Finally, the Great Sabbats can also be laid onto the Compass thus:



I chose to use only single, very common names for each of the great Fire Festivals – the original Sabbats observed by BTW Witches – and I will use alternate names for some in the next diagram as different Traditions / Currents work with differing aspects of given festivals. In the next diagram, I will present this same compass, inverted to work in the Southern Hemisphere:



As Mills are normally worked anti-clockwise rather than deosil in this strain of Craft, having the attributions follow the solar track, as it appears to move in the Southern Hemisphere does not actually upset the working of this compass in any way, whereas a Common Compass would require some re-attribution in order to be worked properly in an inverted configuration. This brings us to the Solar Path or Double Compass that is worked by some Traditions and Currents.

Again several points are worth noting: The power of the four directions is called directly into the center and then spirals up, down and out into the working cone.

While opposition elements are worked across from each other, a distinct progression of motion around the perimeter is also noted. Sun drives the wind that moves the sea that breaks upon the stone. Likewise, sun heats the stones that warm the waves that affect the winds.

## The Double Compass

Our final description is of the double compass. Most Cochranite Traditions work this compass form in one fashion, or another. It is based upon the track of the sun through the course of a year.

If you place a stick upright in the ground and take a sighting of the tip its shadow, every day at the same time for a year, you will find that it traces a 'figure eight' path with a spiral at each end. One spiral will turn deosil, as did its track, and one will turn widdershins. The double compass works this pattern into the energies of the seasonal changes.

It can be worked in several different ways. One method is to work a completely laid out Double Compass (two complete circles prepared and laid in advance,) with the coven moving from one circle to the other, at the main point or points of seasonal change, that is to say Samhain or Samhain and Beltane.

Another means is to change the aspects of the directions at one or both of these points, creating a 'winter' and a 'summer' circle.

A third way might be to work the Mills deosil for half the year and widdershins the other half.

One or more of these methods may be employed to mark the turn of the seasons with the compass, thus aligning it even more closely to the rhythms of the Land, in which it is worked.

## The Sabbats

“... Hallowe'en ... the ritual is our hardest and the pace is killing” –Robert Cochrane

The Sabbats are the ‘Great Meetings’ of the Craft. They are its major holy festivals. There are differences between tradition and tradition as to exactly how they are to be kept, but kept they are. Craft lore is rife with tales purporting to detail meetings of ‘Grand Arrays’ where several coveens – the number thirteen seems ubiquitous in these stories – meet together to keep Sabbat. Accounts of frenzied oracular states, Dionysian revels, Initiations, apparitions, and other magical doings take on an otherworldly and sometimes rather dark-tinged gloss as storytellers embellish their offerings dealing with Walpurgisnacht on Bald Mountain and Samhain or Hallowe'en kept in remote corners of Britain and Brittany.

Initially, only the four Great Fire Festivals were kept. These are sometimes viewed as the Quarter or the Cross Quarter Sabbats, depending on one's viewpoint. Whichever view one chooses to adopt they are called Samhain or Hallowe'en, Brigid, Imbolc/ Oimeic or Candlemas, Beltane or May Eve, and Lughnassad or Lammas. The four ‘lesser,’ solar festivals – the Equinoxes and Solstices – were added to the Traditional Canon in various orders and configurations more recently. Together, these eight festivals form the eight spoke “Wheel of the Year” that Witches now keep. Interestingly, this configuration resembles nothing so much as a Compass Rose (see front cover once again.)

The veil – the barrier that separates this world from the next – is thin at the Great Festivals making them prime times for oracular work. Some Sabbat rites carry specific instructions to work certain divinations at the fire festivals. Whatever the specifics of the work being done, it operates on several different levels, some of which are apparent only to the sight of an Initiate of the particular Mysteries. It is up to the individual Priestess/Maiden or Priest/Magister to decide how much of the rite is to be explained and how much is to be learned through direct experience. It is a common mistake by the inexperienced to underestimate the power of a given rite or ritual because it seems simple or isn't necessarily showy. Leaders tend to watch for this sort of attitude because it tends to separate out the serious magical workers from those who might not go so far on the Road. Those who shun simple, direct, and honest magical work in favor of dramatics and histrionics will certainly require watching and careful guidance. It is better by far to work a simple rite that gets strong results than to stage a badly conceived, last minute amateur theatre piece.

## **Working Sabbat Keys**

Sabbat Keys are symbolic sequences present in the story of the Sabbat working. These work in a progressive fashion as the coven works the cycle of the year. Different levels of the magical psyche are opened and transformed by interacting with the symbols involved in the working of the year.

Outer most and most visible to the Seeker are the Land or Fertility Mysteries whose ties are to paganism. These follow a more or less set pattern dealing specifically with the changes of season, cycles of life, and the cycles of agricultural reality although the methods of presenting the magical tale may vary. Repeated cycles of Sabbats will reinforce the outer meanings while opening up new experiences and insights on the inward journey.

Ritual is a vehicle designed to convey the participants into the magical experience of the Initiate at the appropriate levels of magical awareness and understanding. The main concern is that the correct symbols are presented and worked, completely and in the right order to obtain the desired results.

Most publicly held Sabbat rituals are more in the line of "Mystery Plays" based more-or-less faithfully on folklore surrounding the season, rather than actually working the Sabbat Keys. This can lead the newcomer to Paganism to a mistaken understanding of what the Sabbats are actually about. Should they reach the stage of training in a Traditional coven or coven, their teacher needs to be aware of this early exposure and take steps fairly early in the training process to get the student back on track.

Regardless of what else is planned for the circle, the appropriate Seasonal keys for turning the wheel should be present in Sabbat.

## The Moons

A coven or cuveen may choose to work Full Moons, Dark Moons or both. The sort of work done in a Moon Rite is more intimate than in many Sabbats and guests or even new students may not be present for some rites.

There is no set seasonal progression of Moon rites or work but this does not mean that there is no seasonally or lunar-appropriate work to be done. Individual moons have different associations, depending upon the month and season they fall in, and these factors can be taken into account when deciding on a good choice of rite.

Moon rites tend to be the “bread and butter” workings of the group and may consist of general worship or of specific magical tasks. Some of these might be but are certainly not limited to: working for the benefit of members or relatives in need. Anyone can fall ill or have a friend or relative who needs a helping hand. It is a good idea, and a sign of proper ethics, to be certain that the sort of help we are able to extend is wanted and welcome. The coven may also work in a certain fashion to teach and train newer or newly initiated members. This is a normal part of ongoing group growth and should always be attended with the care that any initiate would wish, were they the student in the ‘hot seat.’ Other possibilities include working for oracular purposes or working to achieve a particular, symbolic goal.

Locality may differ as well. Robert Cochrane and the Clan of Tubal Cain were not known for holding all of their rites in one coven stead but chose, rather, to work in different locations – as far from urban developments as possible – whenever they could. Evan John Jones comments: “ ... had a long strip of land along one bank of the river ... It had everything going for it in a symbolic sense, flowing water, the waterfall, trees, an open space close by and totally exposed to the moonlight ...”<sup>1</sup>

The possibilities of location-based rites are endless and some rites call for certain features on the ground. Other locations that lend themselves to particular symbolic work include: working sites near old grain mills, on lonely stretches of seashore or even at the beach in the off-season if the privacy is afforded, in actual, rural crossroads or near old mounds. In any of these cases, the area should be carefully checked over both for physical safety and for receptivity or rejection of the group’s presence as well as any local permission that might be needed to hold circle in that area. Landowners can be tricky to convince of your sincerity if they catch your group trespassing. On the other hand, a timely and frank approach with, perhaps, a gift or an offer to rent the space can work wonders on a person’s view of you.

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<sup>1</sup> [Roebuck in the Thicket](#), page 106

## Working Moon Keys

**“By blazing fire, oracular head, I call to ye the blessed Dead!” --The Red Book Cosan Tradition.**

Moon keys operate in similar fashion to Sabbat keys except that they are attuned to the intent of the individual meeting rather than tied to a specific seasonal event. They may be worked with the intention of supporting the Sabbats' purposes. In some cases, they may be worked for specific magical purposes or they may be worked and tied to a rite that was created specifically for a given moon. All of these possibilities are dependent upon the individual coven or cuveen and are by no means universal, that is to say, one cuveen may observe a specific ritual for April Moon. This rite may support the Key symbol sequence worked in the March Equinox rite and may contain sequences of smaller keys that work within one or more of the larger keys of the Sabbat. Mention this ritual to members of the cuveen in the next town and you may receive blanks stares in response or 'Are they still working D's rite every April? That's interesting.'

Again, what is important here is that appropriate keys are chosen and worked for the intent behind the ritual. Some times a sequence that seems to a good idea may, in fact, backfire. A published case may be found where a group tried to work an “anti-rape” ritual by symbolically re-enacting what they viewed as a rape from mythological sources. In this case, a rite whose purpose was to create shock on a surface level could easily result in an angry backlash on a deeper level. In some cases we may just have to wipe our foreheads and thank the Gods who look out for the well being of fools. This may also serve as an example of why it is a good idea to keep political gestures and behaviors out of magical circles.

On the other hand, sometimes a seemingly simplistic or even apparently “hokey” ritual will in fact be a potent key combination and will deliver startling results. In some cases an Initiate may approach a ritual that was created with very surface intent, such as a public ritual, with a slightly differing point of view and work it as a potent rite on another level.

The key actions and symbols of the Moon rituals may be worked to cause external change, to create internal change, or to deepen the magical connections and awareness of the coven or cuveen. These keys should not be approached lightly, but rather deserve serious and respectful attention. Working and understanding these keys will also help the Initiate to recognize how they operate in the outer world away from circle. An example of this recognition on the part of an Initiate and the failure to recognize it elsewhere may be seen in the writing of Robert Cochrane from the 1960's.

## Working Keys vs. Working Scripts

Before I go further into this subject, let me posit that everyone works from a script at some point. While this is far from ideal, it sometimes becomes necessary in the practical end. What I really advocate here is the minimizing of scripted rituals and ritual parts. The reasons for this are laid out subsequently.

In ritual, the Keys constitute points of magical interaction and sometimes also form points of transition in the group and individual consciousness. Once again, reading from a script effectively necessitates a state of 'wide awake' and not ritual magical awareness. By contrast, a group that has worked its basic ritual many times over will have entered the needed state and be ready to experience the Keys as they occur.

This level of understanding and awareness is critical to accomplishing the goals of the rite or ritual that is to say, without this understanding the group will have a hard job getting the results it wants. If the preparatory magic is changed every time the group meets – perhaps in the interest of 'keeping it fresh' – then the group will be treated to a (hopefully) interesting spectacle but will be so busy trying to follow the script that half of the magic will be missed.

Working from a well-known basic ritual format has many advantages, not the least of which is the fact that a Cuveen will quickly learn to distinguish between preparatory magic and the Ritual Keys that are the true meat and bones of the rite. Thus, they will know through long familiarity how to mark out the circle, how to raise the quarters and how to do the assorted magical tasks that are involved in reaching the point where they are prepared to enter into, and accomplish, the real work of the rite.

The best work is done when the basic ritual is Coven Knowledge. Everyone in the Coven or Cuveen is familiar with each step. They know who is going to do or say what and how to attune themselves to it. They work each step together, even if they themselves are not the one holding the center of attention at the moment. This way, all members of the group are prepared for the next level of magic that presents itself in every circle working.

## **The Ordinary of the Ritual**

The terms 'ordinary' and 'proper' are working descriptions that I've taken the liberty of borrowing from the Catholic Mass. While many aspects of Catholicism, and indeed Christianity, are in fact anathematic and inimical to the Spirit of Traditional Witchcraft, these two small terms serve us very well.

In the chapter before, I discussed the idea of working Keys as opposed to working a script. Now I'm breaking this notion down further. It is possible to divide Traditional Ritual down into two readily identifiable sections. From the Catholic Canon we borrow the names 'ordinary' and 'proper' to describe them. Here, however, they are the Ordinary of the Compass and the Proper of the Compass.

The Ordinary is the part of the ritual that everyone knows. It is worked approximately the same way every time. The Circle is established a certain way. Inner world links are established and invoked. Certain stances and gestures are used; certain objects picked up and set down. All of these are done to prepare, cleanse and sanctify both the working space and the coven for the presence of the Gods.

These steps form what I call the 'ordinary' of the ritual. Not all ordinaries are identical, not everyone performs exactly the same steps in the same sequence. Even one coven in a single Tradition may have several different ordinaries that it works for different purposes or according to different needs. The main point to remember is that even in these last cases, enough similarity exists among these different Ordinary versions that the Coven or Cuveen can adapt easily to working in any of them.

Once again, I wish to repeat: The Ordinary of the Ritual is Coven Knowledge. All members of the coven or cuveen need to come to a good understanding of each part of the ritual and what is being done, and why it is being done. This permits the group to fully participate and to fully benefit from the magical preparatory steps that form the Ordinary of the Compass.

## The Proper of the Ritual

Another term for this part of a circle might be 'The Rite.' This is the part of the ritual that changes every time. Even if you repeat a more-or-less familiar sequence several celebrations running, each one will be different. This is the part of the circle where the real work is done and magic doesn't always follow the pattern we expect or that we might wish.

In this part of the work, the sequence of actions and symbols that make up the central keys for the given rite will be worked. Some examples of these might be answering a series of challenges, crossing a stream, contributing to a magical story or poem or working any of dozens of different, known, key sequences. What must be remembered is that in this section of the ritual, the group is turning the Mill of Magic and dancing in the presence of Fate. Fate may send visions or oracular experiences. Conversely, nothing unusual may occur at all.

Cochrane has described some of the sensations he experienced at different rites in his letters to William Gray: 'Last year I sweated fearfully as I heard the crying of a baby. It prophesied a death that came true later that year ... a woman in white pacing with us, a skull from the North. Necromancy? Never, just the opening of the Castle's gate ...'<sup>2</sup>

Evan Jones further describes the importance of working the way that is needed for a given rite: '... I cleanse this place of all past influences in the name of the Old Horn God and Lord of the Greenwoods. The odd thing is that this was not the usual practice. By long hallowed Tradition, I should have called the Goddess in the form of Our Lady of the Night, rather than the Old Horn God. Instead I had used a form that owed more to the Ritual of the Castle.'<sup>3</sup>

A very important thing to remember is that when the Castle Door does open, the feelings and experiences will often seem strange, even to those who have worked the keys many times. Very often the sensations will be that the natural order of things has turned upside down. It is important to keep working the keys through this sort of phase for what comes next will be the results and rewards of the work. Evan Jones further relates: ' After pacing for about five minutes the temperature started to drop on what was a warm July night, things started to happen. First of all we began to pick up an impression of a man standing on the bridge across the river from us. So strong did this impression come over that all of us had the feeling that what we were seeing was a miller.'<sup>4</sup>

While we should never set ourselves up for failure by falsely promising this sort of dramatic result, we should also be true Witches and prepared to experience what the Gods and the Old Ones have in store for us instead of expecting them

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<sup>2</sup> The Robert Cochrane Letters: p. 83 Robert Cochrane and Evan John Jones: Capall Bann Publishing 2002

<sup>3</sup> The Roebuck in the Thicket: p. 107 Evan John Jones and Robert Cochrane: Capall Bann Publishing 2001

<sup>4</sup> The Roebuck in the Thicket: pp. 108 – 109 Evan John Jones and Robert Cochrane: Capall Bann 2001

to meekly follow our script. This does not mean that we should just do whatever we want and then say 'Well, it feels right' just to preserve our own comfort level. Rather it means that we need to be prepared to accept and experience what the Gods have in store for us when they answer our call. Very often a confrontation with the Old Ones is also a very primal confrontation with ourselves, as viewed in their mirror and without the rose colored lenses of our own egos. Rather than avoiding this experience, it is the task of the Witch to court it, to experience it and to grow through it to the ecstasy of the spirit that is thus gained 'at the end of desire.'

## **Coven or Cuveen** *What's in a name?*

Gerald Gardner called his initiatory-familial working groups 'covens.' Hopkins, Mather, and Sprenger all called Witches meeting groups 'covens' as well. Robert Cochrane called his group a 'cuveen' or a 'clan.' He also referred to Gardnerian groups as cuveens, tacitly acknowledging their kinship to his own background while, continuing to criticize their public behavior. The question to contemplate here is 'what's in a name?'

We already know from our study of magic and its laws that a name is a very powerful piece of Lore. It can be a critical piece of information and much haggling can go on over in various communities over just what something should be called or just how precisely the name for a given thing describes and defines it. Interestingly, in a community that avoids precise linguistic definition socially, the magic and spirituality in our veins demands it.

Gardner states that the origin of the word coven derives from 'convent,' that is to say 'an intentional community bound together by a common covenant.' In the word 'covenant' we, in fact, see the word 'coven.' So a Coven is a familial group of Witches bound together by a common covenant.

'Just what is a covenant?' should be the next question we address here. A covenant is a sacred bond. It is a sacred compact made in love and trust and full agreement. Merriam-Webster defines it thus: 'a formal, solemn and binding agreement.' So the members of a covenanted body have made such an agreement as to the nature and confidentiality of their meetings and association.

Robert Cochrane described his term, cuveen, as deriving from the verb convene. Thus the Cochranite term means to gather together or to meet. A good definition of both terms can be found in combining them: A covenanted body that meets together. This body is bound by solemn agreement to respect the confidentiality and privacy of its members and to protect the clan-access nature of its lore. It also agrees to respect the privacy and confidentiality of its meetings and meeting-place(s).

He goes further to say that the solemn oaths taken by the Southern (New Forest) and Northern (Cheshire) covens were different from what was required of him. Indeed he says '... all that was required of me was my word that I would be discreet.' However he later tells William Gray: 'My word prevents me.' Taken together these two statements illustrate a great deal about the Witches' Covenant.

## The Word of a Witch

Whether it is given in the form of a solemn vow or in the agreement of a compact, the Word of a Witch must be as inviolable as the Witch is able to make it. The Witch is only as good as his or her word and is bound by that word for all time. Why is this so? Isn't this 'dogmatic' – as some people would insist? Here we find a seeming quandary and we must examine this puzzle, for nobody can cross the bridge into circle without the trust of their fellow Witches.

Trust is an interesting word. Trust is not faith to be handed out blindly but rather a form of respect to be earned and cherished. It is earned by doing such things as keeping one's word and keeping the confidence of one's friends. Indeed a friend who couldn't wait to run to his or her fellows and divulge all that is to be known of someone's deepest confidence is no friend at all. So it is with the Craft. The members of a coven or coveen are coming together as they have covenanted and are meeting in the trust that they may open themselves fully to the Gods of the Craft and to each other in the full knowledge that this trust and vulnerability will be honored and cherished and that each member in turn will safeguard their fellows' confidence in like fashion.

The Elders and teachers of a Tradition are also placing a huge trust in those whom they teach. They are trusting that their students will not turn upon them and lead hostile or sensation seeking people to their door. They are trusting that the students will not abuse the Tradition they are vouchsafed by trying to turn it to profit in violation of their word and that students will not abuse others who may be seeking along the path by exposing them to its Mysteries untaught and unprepared. Thus the secrecy of the Craft is not merely to protect itself, but also to safeguard those who are not proper to it from harm.

The Craft teaches the loosing of the hands from the fetters of fear and ignorance with the knife of judgment, discernment and responsibility. Indeed, the only force that may bind the Will of a Witch is, in fact, the Will of that Witch. By giving his or her Good Word to clan and coveen, the Witch signifies that he or she is indeed bound by this one, and only this one, force and the Gods will hold this word for all time.

The Word of the Witch does not 'go away.' Nor does it fade with time. Nor is anyone who claims the title of Witch exempt from this one rule. Changing one's mind does not matter, once given; the Word can never be retracted. Those who claim otherwise have proven, time and time again that they are completely unworthy of the trust of their Peers and Elders. The breaker of a Covenant is, by his or her own Will and Word, a being accursed. Such a person is worthy of pity but should never be allowed into a circle while the unamended curse of the breach hangs over their head. The result can be only disaster.

## Clan, Cuveen and Hearth

Finally we come to the end of our walk together and hopefully to the beginning of a walk further with new things for you, the reader, to think over. I propose to end the discussion with a few thoughts on the nature of the structures of the Craft such as they are. In the early days of the Modern Craft, the 1950's and 1960's, the most noted members of the craft community were the followers of Gardner, Sanders and Cochrane. Students of these three would go on to create variant lines and strains and some hybrids between the three to create the spectrum of British Traditional Witchcraft that exists today.

In the strains of Cochrane Craft that exist today, the original Clan of Tubal Cain remains the wellspring. Other variants and hybrids include 1734, Mohsian and Cosan Traditions to name only a few. Other branches, often called currents, make themselves known from time to time and their Elders often have some interesting things to impart.

One small topic that needs addressing is why are Cuveens so small? Why do they guard their small size and autonomy so jealously? What about the tales of Grand Covens and Grand Arrays? Don't these things happen anymore? Whether a Grand Array ever did happen is a matter of Craft Traditions and Lore. It is said that Sir Francis Drake called and led one on behalf of Queen Elizabeth I against the Spanish Armada. Gerald Gardner told a tale of taking part in a Grand Array working against *Operation Sea Lion* – the threatened invasion of Britain by Hitler's Wehrmacht and Kriegsmarine in 1940.

Could one Priestess or Magister assemble such an array? Possibly. Could it hold together for very long? My answer would be that such a thing is unlikely. Witches are not chosen for our ability to herd along meekly. One of the most desirable traits in a candidate is a healthy streak of stubborn independence. This is because Traditional Craft has no followers. Everyone is a leader and everyone has a chance – if they so desire – to found a coven of their own once they have attained sufficient experience.

The best sort of 'larger organization' one should look for might be called a 'hearth,' or a 'county.' These terms all amount to more or less the same thing. Any coven or cuveen, working and growing normally, will eventually find daughter cuveens fissioning off in a process that is sometimes called 'hiving.' While each daughter cuveen is an autonomous group all such groups are closely related and naturally tend to retain a feeling of some familial connection to each other. They may gather together for the Great Sabbats, as has been suggested by more than one source. The senior Elder may have a title of one sort or another, although as a rule, Cochrane Witches tend to avoid the use of aristocratic titles, reserving very special meaning for the few instances that we do use such.

The association between the cuveens in such an association would be that of the families of neighboring, married siblings but again, each household – that is to say each cuveen or coven – still retains its full autonomy.

Stories such as those concocted about George Pickingill, that one man could be Magister for a dozen groups, or for that matter, one woman could be Priestess or Maid in similar fashion are simply not feasible. Attending to all of the tasks involved in facilitating meetings and circles is an enormous amount of work for only one coven, even with all of the Initiates pitching in to help. Tripling or adding even more to these tasks would be an exhausting and frustrating experience guaranteed to dampen the ego of the most ambitious coven leader.

In closing, I would like to quote a rhyme from my own home. It is about the raising and building of a cuveen or coven and I think it appropriate to share here:

Upon the stone was kindled fire  
About the fire the hearth  
Above them spread the broad roof tree  
Gave both height and girth  
About the hearth the household  
About the house the hall  
About the hall there turned the moat  
And the wide world about them all

--- The Cosan Red Book

## **Suggested Reading List And Bibliography**

Those who are interested may wish to look up further material on this deep and beautiful side of British Traditional Craft. I recommend the following publications to the interested person:

Witchcraft: A Tradition Renewed  
Evan John Jones and Doreen Valiente  
1990 Phoenix Publishing Company  
Custer, WA  
ISBN 0-919345-1

The Roebuck In The Thicket: An Anthology of the Robert Cochrane Witchcraft Tradition  
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2001 Capall Bann Publishing  
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The Mabinogion  
Translated by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones  
1949 Everyman's Library  
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The White Goddess  
Robert Graves  
1948 The Noonday Press  
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