

John of Monmouth with Gillian Spraggs and Shani Oates, *Genuine Witchcraft is Explained: The Secret History of the Royal Windsor Coven and the Regency* (Milverton, Somerset: Capall Bann, 2012), 479 pp., £17.95 (paperback).

One of the most enigmatic, and indeed influential figures at the forefront of what has been called Britain's "Witchcraft Revival" was the English occultist Robert Cochrane (1931–1966), the magister of a coven best known as the Clan of Tubal Cain. Following Cochrane's suicide in 1966, two of the Clan's founding members, George Stannard (c.1912-1983) and Ronald White (1928-1998), went on to forge a new Pagan order known as The Regency. Under White's leadership, this order eventually began holding large public Sabbat celebrations on North London's Hampstead Heath. In doing so, it brought contemporary Paganism to a new audience and helped to usher in the period of greater tolerance and understanding that British Pagans enjoy today. In 1974, White handed over the reigns of leadership to a man publicly known by the pseudonym of John of Monmouth, who has held the largely nominal position ever since. Now, following the deaths of its founding fathers, John has decided to produce a history of his group, the final result of which is the tome under review here. While this of course means that he is a "subjective insider" with vested interests in the manner in which The Regency is portrayed, I believe he paints a convincing "warts and all" picture that does not shy away from the more controversial aspects of his group's heritage.

Published by Capall Bann, a small independent press known for prolific publication of titles dealing with Traditional Witchcraft, the first seven chapters of this thick volume are authored by John himself and present a thorough and well-written account of both Cochrane's coven and The Regency which evolved from it. Although the history of the Clan of Tubal Cain has been told in print several times before (by the likes of Ronald Hutton, Evan John Jones, and Michael Howard), that of The Regency has been widely neglected, and this is undoubtedly the most in-depth study of the group yet published, one which is unlikely to be surpassed any time soon. Both accounts draw from a wide array of fresh primary sources, truly offering a wealth of new information that will come as a delight for anyone fascinated by this area of new religious history.

While the new information on the history of The Regency is undoubtedly exciting, the newly unearthed records of the early years of Cochrane's coven utilised by John are arguably of far greater his-

torical importance. In the past, it has always been maintained that all of Cochrane's documents were destroyed following his death by relatives who wished to avoid them falling into the hands of the authorities. As far as I am aware, no one ever checked to see if other Clan members owned any documents pertinent to the group's origins. However, John's work here makes use of a set of notes owned by Stannard dating to the period between c.1961–62 and 1966. These documents – which have been authenticated by both Marian Aldhouse-Green and the historian Ronald Hutton – quite literally revolutionise the historical understanding of Cochrane's Clan. They publicly reveal for the first time that the coven's original name was the somewhat mundane "Thames Valley Coven," before being changed to the "Royal Windsor Coven"; the now widely known term "Clan of Tubal Cain" only emerging later. They also illustrate the significant extent to which Stannard and White helped fashioned the Clan and its rituals, something for which earlier studies have given Cochrane almost full credit. This new information, wonderfully sewn together and threaded into a convincing narrative by John, is done in a manner which invites obvious comparisons with the work of Philip Heselton, whose investigation into the early history of Gardnerian Wicca has thoroughly enriched our understanding of contemporary Pagan history. Quite simply, this is independent Pagan scholarship at its finest.

John's historical narrative is followed by an offering from Shani Oates, the current Maid of the Clan of Tubal Cain, in which she describes the recent history of her own lineage and the manner in which the Clan's practices differed from those of The Regency. Interesting as that is, in essence this chapter offers very little with regards to new information; much more material is available in Oates and Evan John Jones' recent publication *The Star Crossed Serpent Volume I: Origins* (Mandrake, 2012). This latter volume will also be of great interest to many readers of *The Pomegranate*.

The second half of the book is somewhat more eclectic in its content, opening with a short memoir and biography of Ronald White written by a friend of his, the English studies scholar Gillian Spraggs. This is followed by White's previously unpublished work *The New Pagans' Handbook*, in which he discusses The Regency's theology, mythology, and the rituals for the eight Sabbats. For the scholar of Pagan Studies, this offers a chance to better understand the ritual practices of The Regency as envisioned by one of the group's great figureheads, and its addition here is most welcome. The work is rounded off with appendices containing the all-important Stannard docu-

ments dealing with the development of Cochrane's coven during its early years. The book's editor has included both photographs of the original documents and more legible transcripts. By taking this important step, future researchers will be able to check the documents for themselves and come to their own conclusions rather than relying entirely on John's analysis, ultimately allowing for a potential multiplicity of views.

It is this reviewer's opinion that *Genuine Witchcraft is Explained* is one of the most significant publications dealing with contemporary Paganism yet produced by a non-academic practitioner in the twenty-first century. Admittedly the work does feel a little disjointed at times because it mixes texts by various different authors and of various different lengths; similarly, the overall bulk of the book suggests a hardback format. Irrespective of these minor criticisms, this is an excellent study that does a very efficient job in detailing a poorly understood area of Pagan history. This book is of real value to anyone interested in the development of both the Pagan Witchcraft and Traditional Witchcraft currents in modern Western Esotericism. It also stands as a conclusive testament that practising Pagans have a very important role to play in chronicling their own histories.

Ethan Doyle White
University College London