

PATRICIA CROWTHER

When I was a child we lived next door to Madame Melba who was a clairvoyant and a palmist and she told my mother that I would be interested in

Patricia is a witch and a high priestess. She was born in 1927 in Sheffield. Her great-grandmother from Brittany was a herbalist and clairvoyant. When Patricia was 30, a hypnotist regressed her back to previous lives including one as an old witch called Polly in the year 1670. She trained as a singer and dancer and it was while playing a summer season on the Isle of Wight that she met her future husband, Arnold Crowther, a stage musician and ventriloquist. He introduced her to Gerald Gardner in 1960 and after several meetings Patricia was initiated by Gardner into witchcraft in the private Magic Room at the top of his house in Castletown on the Isle of Man. She was known by the magical name of Thelima Aphrodite. Her Sheffield coven has been in existence for over thirty years.

magic. I was fascinated by the moon, I loved staring at it. I was the fairy on the moon at one Christmas party and later I was the leading lady in a revue with a tableau entitled 'The Legend of the Moon Goddess'. Then I read *The White Goddess* by Robert Graves and this told me very forcibly that the goddess had been worshipped all over the world in the past. I had been looking for the feminine figure in deity, the father God wasn't interesting to me. I thought there must be a mother figure somewhere and that's where I found it. Later I found that the goddess was indeed worshipped in a religion that was still active and that was witchcraft.

My husband introduced me to Gerald Gardner. He took me over to the Isle of Man and we got on like a house on fire. He was an amazing man, full of knowledge, a marvellous sense of humour

and he offered to initiate me into the craft of the wise. I was anxious to learn all about the mysteries, especially of the goddess. The initiation was



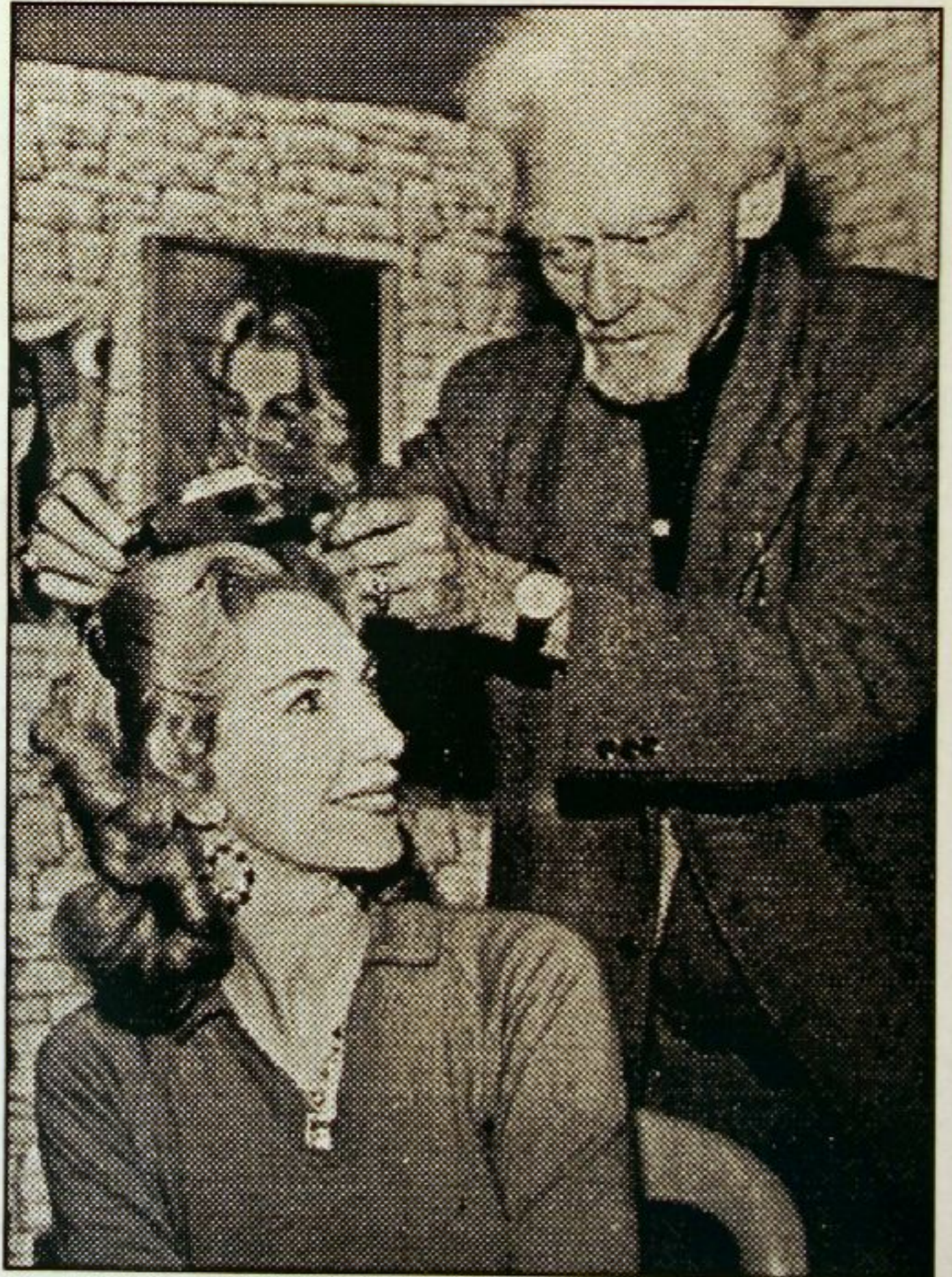
performed in the upper room of the barn of his house, attached to his house in Castletown. It was a wonderful experience and I just thought how could it be that there was all this going on behind the natural world? There was something so marvellous that had always existed behind the mundane of everyday living.

When you're initiated you come into the craft as you were born, without any ties. The initiation is performed without clothes, you are brought through the triangle of the goddess, the birth triangle and you become a child of the goddess. Of course, I was very nervous. I sat there holding my dressing gown tightly around me and Gerald said, 'You'll have to take that off, you know dear. You can't have that on.' Gerald used to say female witches usually wear a necklace and a smile. So I wore the necklace of the goddess which represents the circle of infinity and also I wore the garter and this, of course, is a very ancient insignia of the craft. As soon as you're in the circle and things are happening, it all seems perfectly reasonable and proper and you forget you haven't got any clothes on. Not all rituals are performed skyclad, as we call nude, quite a lot of them are performed with robes but the three degrees of initiation are certainly performed without clothes. There's no ulterior motive, it's just a beautiful ceremony and that's all there is to it.

I told people, I didn't hide it because I thought it was a wonderful thing to be a member of the craft, but Mother was often stopped by people in the street who would say, 'What's all this, Mrs Dawson. Is it true they really worship the devil?' Mother put them right and said, 'No, we worship the great goddess, it's nothing to do with the devil.'

I passed through the three degrees

*Patricia Crowther is crowned
'Queen of the Sabbats' by Gerald
Gardner.*



and that enabled me to start my own coven if I wished but I left it in the hands of a goddess for another year. Then a reporter from a local paper asked me if I was interested in meeting people with similar beliefs. I said yes and she put in the report: 'Witch seeks recruits for coven.' People came and knocked at the door and we selected one person who was eventually initiated as the first member of the Sheffield coven. I had plenty ask but not many were initiated. They had to prove that they were sincere in wanting to worship the old gods. They came from all walks of life: photographers, doctors – they were very interested – nurses especially, ordinary house-

wives. We had one gentleman from Scotland, a very clever industrialist and he eventually started his own group from which a dozen other groups eventually emerged.

We celebrated the eight festivals of the year, we had meetings for meditation, we had meetings when we worked magic and we also had meetings to celebrate successful magical enterprises. Sometimes the coven would meet in the open air, we chose a stone circle in Derbyshire. We had the temple in my house and Mummy decorated it with stone wallpaper; it had wooden beams so it

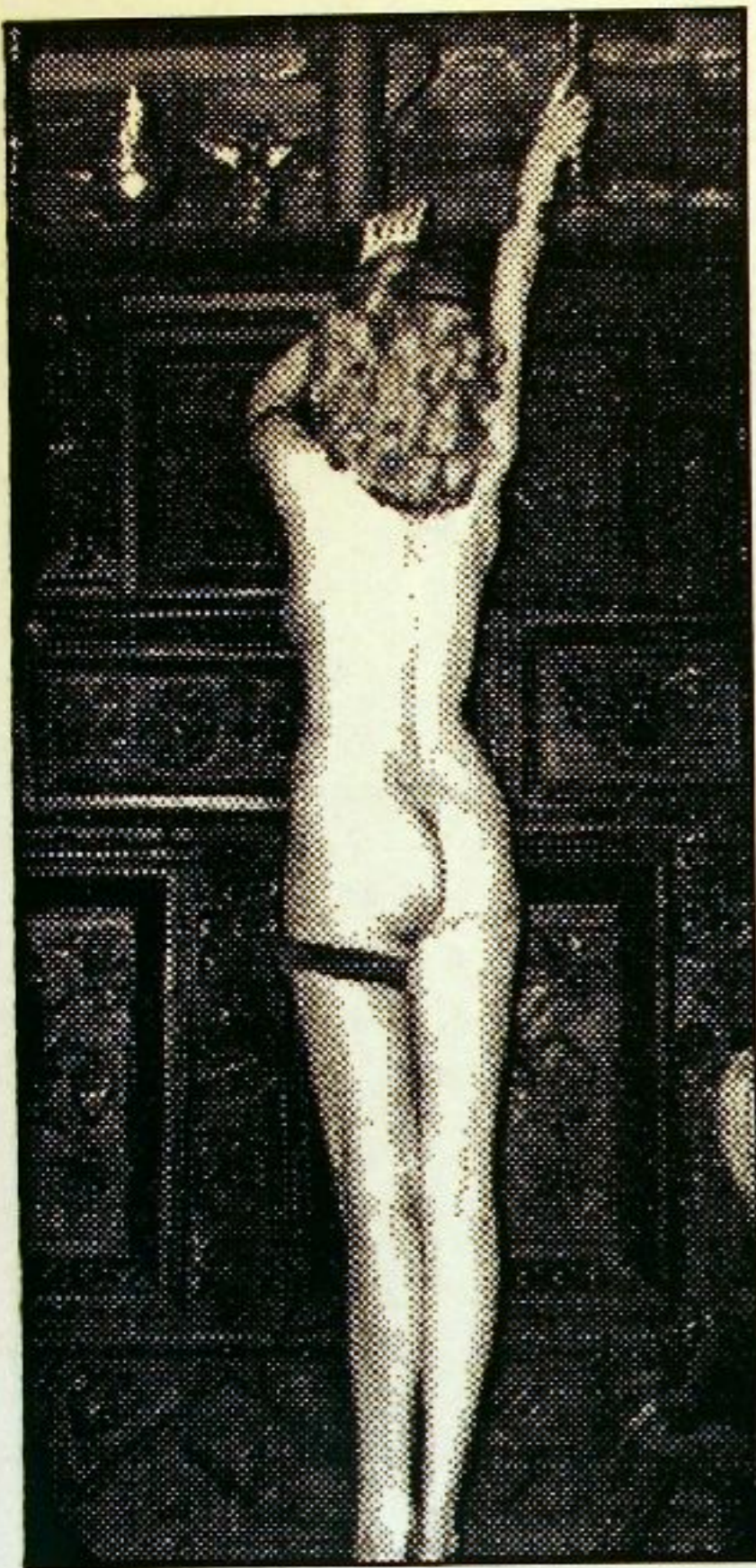


was very atmospheric. We would go skylad, open the circle and consecrate it with water, purify it with incense, bless the people in the circle and ask the goddess and god to look over and protect us.

We performed a lot of magical workings for other people, mostly to heal them. People used to write hundreds of letters asking for our help even though some of them didn't believe in witchcraft. It was very good to be skylad when you're working magic because the power comes from the body. You have to raise your nerve power and this is usually done through a circular dance where you go round and round in order to produce a cone of power. You concentrate on the part of the person that needs healing and chant a few words of rhyme like 'Betty must be healed. Betty must be healed.' In the first ten years we think we had 80% success rates.

The newspapers had the wrong idea about witches and what they got up to in the sixties. There was a lot of rubbish written about sacrificing babies and worshipping the devil. There was also this idea that we sacrificed

*'Witches were
pioneers of
women's liberation.'*



virgins. I always said that it was very difficult to find a virgin in those days. I was very anxious to tell them how wonderful a religion it is and how we did a lot of good for people. There were some who joined for sensational reasons, because they thought they could take advantage of the rituals being performed naked, but they were swiftly given the boot if they ever happened to be initiated.

I felt I had a mission in those days to tell people about the goddess because for centuries they were used to worshipping a male god. My life changed when I realised that the female is equally important as, if not more important than, the male of the species. The witches were pioneers, really, of women's liberation because, for anything to happen on the physical plane, you have to acknowledge it first on a spiritual level and of course the goddess was being acknowledged by that time on the spiritual levels. So women began to assert their position in life.

Patricia Crowther's coven met in her Sheffield home. 'We would go skyclad [ie naked], open the circle, purify it with incense and ask the goddess and god to protect us.'