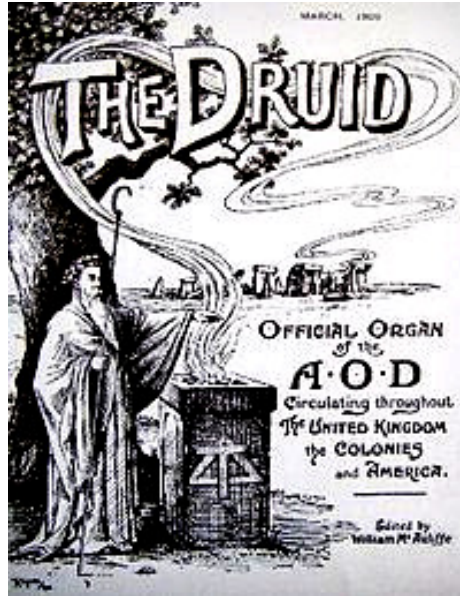


Ancient Order of Druids



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The Ancient Order of Druids (AOD) is a fraternal organization founded in London, England in 1781 that still operates to this day. It is the earliest known English group to be founded based upon the iconography of the ancient druids, who were priest-like figures in Iron Age Celtic paganism. As such, the Order was an early influence upon the development of the Neo-druidic movement, however it differs from most contemporary Neo-druidic groups in that it does not hold to a Neo-pagan religion, and is "not a religious organization – in fact any discussion on religion or politics is forbidden within the lodge rooms". Instead its members are expected "to preserve and practice the main principles attributed to the early Druids, particularly those of justice, benevolence and friendship."

History

Origins

The origins of the Ancient Order of Druids are still largely mysterious, because much of the original source material from the time of its foundation has been lost. However, it is known that it was founded in 1781 in London, and it arose at a time when the idea of voluntary societies and clubs was becoming particularly popular in the country, with the historian Peter Clark stating that around 130 different types of club had come into existence. The historian Ronald Hutton noted that two pre-existing Welsh clubs, the Druid Society, which was based on Anglesey, and the Society of the Druids of Cardigan, had already been founded in the previous decades, basing their names and some of their iconography upon what was then believed about the ancient druids. By the 1920s, two different stories were circling amongst members of the Order regarding its foundation. The first held that it was created by a group of friends who were merchants and artisans who liked to regularly meet at the King's Arms tavern just off Oxford Street in the West End of London. To keep out unwanted intruders, they became a formal society, and chose to adopt the name of the druids at the suggestion of one of their members, a Mr. Hurlle, who had a particular interest in the ancient druids. The second story held that the group of friends who met at the King's Arms decided,

after the death of one of their number, to form an organization to honor his memory by raising a fund to provide his bereaved mother with enough money to live. The historian Ronald Hutton noted that the second account was "of course, perfectly compatible with the first" but that he believed it to be less likely for there was no known source for it prior to the 1920s. However it was founded, it is known that the first leader or "Arch druid" of the group was the aforementioned Mr. Hurle, who the historian Wilhelm North posited, in a 1932 pamphlet, had actually been Henry Hurle, a wealthy carpenter, surveyor and builder who worked at Garlick Hill in London. Meanwhile, a plaque is now found on the wall of the King's Arms Inn stating that the Order was founded there.

Development, Spread and Schism

The success of the group that met at the King's Arms, which came to be called Lodge No. 1, spawned the creation of a number of other lodges of the Order being founded elsewhere by new initiates, with Lodge No. 2 being inaugurated on 21 August 1783 and meeting at Rose Tavern, along the Ratcliffe Highway, Wapping. Lodge No. 3 was soon after opened in Westminster, and according to a rumor within the Order, the politician Charles James Fox was initiated into the Order through this lodge by Hulme himself, possibly in an attempt to gain wider popularity amongst the voters in the borough.

By 1785, the AOD had six lodges in London, with a further one located in Ipswich, and by 1791 there was a string of them across southern England. However, in 1794, with the French revolution causing a panic amongst many in the British government, who feared a revolutionary movement at home, great suspicion was cast upon secretive societies, and due to this a number of the lodges shut down, including that in Westminster. Nonetheless, by the start of the nineteenth century, twenty-two lodges remained open. By 1831 this had risen to 193 lodges, and the Order's membership itself had risen to over 200,000. However, discontent was rising in the Order. Ever since its inception, its members had come from a variety of different social backgrounds, and many of the poorer members, particularly in the newly industrial towns in the English Midlands, wanted it to act more like the benefit clubs and friendly societies such as the Odd fellows, the Foresters and the Shepherds, which were then rising in popularity. These benefit clubs collected membership fees into a central fund that they used to care for members who were too ill to work, or unable to pay for their funerals. In particular, these dissenting voices wanted to cease sending a percentage of their funds to the Grand Lodge (formerly Lodge No. 1), and to introduce more democratic reforms within the movement, so that the Arch druids of each lodge had a larger say over the movement. In the first years of the 1830s, a group of lodges decided to found an elected United Provisional Committee, but in retaliation the Grand Lodge and its allies expelled them from the Order, further galvanizing the organization into two camps. In 1833, about half of the AOD, numbering over a hundred lodges, split from the Grand Lodge in protest, and formed the United Ancient Order of Druids. This event has subsequently become known as "the Great Secession" amongst members of the Order.

United Ancient Order of Druids

The United Ancient Order of Druids (UAOD) took a more democratic and socially-conscientious view than the AOD, being run by an elected Board of Directors and aiming for "social and intellectual intercourse" and "general philanthropy and benevolence". It became a success, and by 1846 had 330 lodges across England and Wales as well as several overseas. The original Ancient Order of Druids also grew in numbers and became more successful, and according to Ronald Hutton, "Both halves of the former Ancient Order were therefore poised to make a significant

contribution to Victorian culture. The more so in that by this time they were not alone among British voluntary societies in having the identity of Druid."

Australia

The first Druids Lodge in Victoria was established in Melbourne in 1851 by a Mr. Hymen who arrived from London with authority from the AOD, but a permanent lodge did not eventuate until Asher Barnard established a lodge in 1861. A Victorian Grand Lodge of the United Ancient Order of Druids was begun around 1862 with Mr. A Hunt appointed first Grand Secretary. Alderman James J. Brenan (1843–1914) was Grand Secretary of the for over 40 years from 1875 and, with the establishment of the Supreme Grand Lodge of Australia and New Zealand in 1912, he was granted the title Supreme Arch Druid. Total membership of the Supreme Lodge was then reported to be 72,000. Mr. W.T. Simpson similarly held the role of Grand Treasurer from 1875 to 1914, being succeeded by J.T. Whiteway. Juvenile lodges were established in Prahran in 1886, and in South Melbourne and Footscray, but had ceased to exist by 1900. The first female lodge was opened in 1899 in Launceston, Tasmania, and by about 1925 there were fifteen ladies lodges. Proceeds from fundraising efforts enabled the Victorian Lodge to erect its own buildings at 407-9 Swanston Street, Melbourne, which was opened by the Lord Mayor on 4 April 1927.

Reference: Wikipedia