

# Monique Wilson & The Gardner Estate

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## Monique Wilson

Monique "Nickie" Marie Mauricette Wilson nee Arnoux<sup>1</sup> (Olwen) was a Witch Queen, the High Priestess of covens in Scotland and the Isle of Man, and the heir to Gerald B. Gardner. She is perhaps best known for initiating Raymond Buckland (Robat) in 1963 and helping him spread Witchcraft to the United States. For nearly a decade, she acted as the proprietor of the late Gerald Gardner's Museum of Witchcraft and Magic. She enjoyed a period of media attention in Britain during the late '60s and early '70s—appearing on the cover of *Observer* magazine and being featured in *National Geographic*, *Frontiers of Belief*, and several British newspapers. Wilson suffered the enmity of some in the British Witchcraft community when she sold the museum's collection to Ripley's Believe it or Not, Ltd. Following the sale to Ripley's in 1973, Wilson retired to a private life in Spain where she left the public eye, taking the rights to Gardner's literary estate with her.

Monique Wilson was born in 1923 in Haiphong, Vietnam to French parents.<sup>2</sup> She met Campbell "Scotty" Crozier Wilson (Loic), a bomber pilot for the Royal Air Force, in Hong Kong following World War II.<sup>3</sup> Campbell was a native of Scotland, born in Stirling in 1923. The two married and had a daughter named Yvette Andree Wilson, born in London in 1957. By the early 1960s, the family was living modestly on a pea farm in Perth, Scotland while Campbell worked for the local gas board.<sup>4</sup>

The Wilsons were interested in Witchcraft and the occult—later citing deep hereditary ties—and this interest led them to write to Gerald Gardner around 1960. Gardner referred the Wilsons to his friend and fellow Witch, Charles Clark, and Clark trained and initiated them.<sup>5</sup> By



<sup>1</sup> Seims, Melissa, letter to Wiccan Roots mailing list, (February, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Seims; Some sources give her place of birth as the Island of Ushant in Brittany and also describe her as half Vietnamese.

<sup>3</sup> Howard, Michael, "Gerald Gardner: The Man, The Myth & The Magick," <<http://www.thewica.co.uk/MH4.htm>> (1997).

<sup>4</sup> Seims.

<sup>5</sup> Seims, Melissa, "Charles Clark: Gardnerian High Priest and Child of the Wica," <<http://www.thewica.co.uk/Charles%20Clark%20Article.htm>>.

late 1961, Monique had founded a coven in Perth. The following year, a disagreement with Clark led Wilson to seek Gardner's help. The two first met in person in 1962 at a Witches' meeting, and Monique later received the third degree from Gardner.<sup>6</sup>

Monique's most influential initiate was Raymond Buckland. Buckland was born in 1934 in England and was also an RAF veteran. After reading *Witchcraft Today*, he started a long-distance correspondence with Gardner in the late '50s. When Buckland and his wife Rosemary immigrated to Long Island, New York in 1962, Gardner arranged for them to act as an American contact for those who wrote him interested in Witchcraft. On November 18, 1963, Buckland traveled to Perth where Wilson trained him over a period of ten days and initiated him. The Bucklands went on to form the first American coven in 1964 and continued a correspondence with Gardner and Wilson.

### Gerald Gardner's Will

Following a period of ill health in autumn or early winter of 1963, Gardner booked a trip to the Middle East where he could convalesce in the warm climate. In January, Gardner visited the British Vice-Consul in Beirut and finalized a new will.<sup>7</sup> The revised will, after apportioning cash sums and various other articles to friends and family, left an estate valued at the time at more than £21,000 GBP to Monique Wilson. Wilson was to inherit the contents of the museum, property, cash, and Gardner's residual estate that included the rights to his literary works.<sup>8</sup>

Having departed from Lebanon aboard the *SS Scottish Prince*, Gerald Gardner died on the morning of February 12, 1964 in the breakfast lounge while the ship sailed along the coast of North Africa. He was buried in Tunis. Eleanor "Ray" Bone later moved his remains to somewhere "near the ancient city of Carthage" when development threatened the cemetery in Tunis.<sup>9</sup>

Some members of Gardner's extended family were unhappy and suspicious of the changes to the will, but they were never able to bring a successful legal challenge to the will's execution.<sup>10</sup> Monique Wilson inherited most of Gardner's possessions. The museum building and grounds had been left to its aged caretaker William Worrall but fell to Wilson sometime later that year when Worrall declined the responsibility.

Following Gardner's death, the Wilsons moved to the Isle of Man where they operated the museum for nearly a decade. Wilson authorized the Citadel Press to produce paperback copies of *Witchcraft Today*, and she may have been involved with the negotiations between Red Wheel / Weiser and The Aquarian Press to produce a new edition of *The Meaning of Witchcraft*. Wilson enjoyed largely favorable media attention from such publications as *Observer* magazine, *National Geographic*, and *Frontiers of*

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<sup>6</sup> Richards, Denise, "To a Top Witch I Bequeth..." *Evening Standard* interview with Jack Bracelin, (September 19, 1964); Seims.

<sup>7</sup> Heselton, Philip, *Gerald Gardner and the Cauldron of Inspiration*, (United Kingdom: Capal Ban, 2003), 368; Gardner, Miriam, telephone interview by author, 12 July 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Gardner, Gerald, Last Will & Testament (January, 1964).

<sup>9</sup> Witchvox, "Eleanor Bone," < [http://www.witchvox.com/va/dt\\_va.html?a=usfl&c=passages&id=4227](http://www.witchvox.com/va/dt_va.html?a=usfl&c=passages&id=4227)> (April, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Gardner, Miriam.

*Belief*.<sup>11</sup> Around 1969, a hostile media article alleged that Wilson was involving young Yvette in witch rites, and the girl was placed under the supervision of a probation officer for a period of three years.<sup>12</sup> In 1972, lacking money and community support, the Wilsons decided to leave Britain.

### The Dispersal of Gerald Gardner's Estate

In January of 1973, Monique Wilson sold the 10,000-item museum collection, including Gardner's 3,000 volume library, to Ripley's Believe it or Not, Ltd for the sum of £120,000. Charles Bristoll, Ripley's international VP, and John Turner, General Manager of Ripley's in Blackpool, negotiated the sale. The collection was shipped to the Ripley's facility at Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco where it was made part of a garish exhibit.<sup>13</sup> One of Gardner's old friends, Angus McLeod, gathered some of the papers and items not taken by Ripley's and later burned most of them.<sup>14</sup> The Witches' Mill property was sold to Colin Flick and Douglas Bolton, changed hands several times, and was eventually converted into residential properties in 1995.<sup>15</sup>

In 1973, the Wilsons moved to Torremolinos, near Málaga, on the coast of Spain—a town popular with British tourists and expatriates. They bought a café, and Monique Wilson continued practicing witchcraft for at least the next two years, seeding a coven in Germany. She died in 1982.<sup>16</sup> Campbell lived through the late '90s in the US, visiting Australia and keeping up with some of those he met in the Craft, while distancing himself from the larger community.<sup>17</sup> Yvette actively avoids contact with anyone wishing to discuss Witchcraft or anything associated with it.<sup>18</sup>

The Ripley's museum in San Francisco closed sometime in the 1970s, and the Gardner collection was transferred to their museum in St. Augustine, Florida. The collection was displayed for a time in Florida before lack of interest in the socially conservative '80s relegated the exhibition to storage indefinitely. From that time forward, the collection was sold off piecemeal from Florida and from the Ripley's headquarters in Toronto.

Allen Greenfield, visiting the Ripley's museum in the '80s, found several artifacts from the Gardner collection in the giftshop “just opposite the little alligators that have 'St. Augustine, Florida - America's Oldest City' stickered on their plastic bellies.” Greenfield eventually negotiated with John Turner and Norm Deska for the purchase of Gardner's

<sup>11</sup> Thomas, Veronica, “The Manx and Their Island,” *National Geographic*, (September, 1972); Colin, Cross, “The Witches Ride Again,” *Observer*, (December, 1968); Unknown, “The Witches of Man,” *Frontiers of Belief*, (unknown).

<sup>12</sup> Hutton, Ronald, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), 328.

<sup>13</sup> Unknown, “Witches Treasure Will Go To America,” *Manx Star*, (January 15, 1973).

<sup>14</sup> Crowther, Patricia, *High Priestess: The Life and Times of Patricia Crowther* (Blaine: Phoenix, 1998), 118.

<sup>15</sup> Unknown, “Leader [...] Witchcraft to End?” *Isle of Man Courier*, (January 19, 1973); Heselton, 370.

<sup>16</sup> Phillips, Julia, “History Of Wicca In England: 1939 to the Present Day,” <[http://www.geraldgardner.com/History\\_of\\_Wicca\\_Revised.pdf](http://www.geraldgardner.com/History_of_Wicca_Revised.pdf)> (2004); Sources are unclear as to cause of death but rumor is a car accident.

<sup>17</sup> Seims; Phillips.

<sup>18</sup> Seims.

Ordo Templi Orientis charter and was also offered a chance to purchase the manuscript *Ye Bok of Ye Art Magical* in 1986.<sup>19</sup>

At around the same time, a man representing the “A&B Trading Company” purchased a large quantity of trinkets from the museum collection and offered them for sale via mail-order in occult magazines. What he didn't sell in the '80s was brokered on eBay twenty years later with individual beads sometimes being sold for more than \$75 USD.

In 1987, Richard and Tamarra James, founders of the Wiccan Church of Canada, purchased the remainder of the Gardner material that Ripley's had including the books and manuscripts from Gardner's library. The James' collection is currently housed in Toronto and has been made available to researchers on occasion.

Lesser pieces of Gardner's estate are scattered around the world. Cecil Williamson, original founder of the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic on the Isle of Man, went on to create a Museum of Witchcraft in Boscastle, Cornwall. His heirs currently maintain a collection that includes a body of documents, letters, and pictures relating to Gardner. Ray Buckland has displayed a selection of relevant documents and artifacts off and on since the '60s. John Belham-Payne, heir of Doreen Valiente, also travels and displays documents relating to Gardner. The Wilsons took several important and interesting pieces with them to Spain, and these items may now be in their daughter's possession. Rare books and manuscripts continue to appear on the market. In 2007, Treadwells in London was selling an autographed copy of *High Magic's Aid* for £1650 GBP.

### **Gerald Gardner's Literary Estate**

Gerald Gardner's literary estate has not survived him any better than the collection he worked a lifetime to build. Monique Wilson inherited the rights to his books as part of his residual estate. Since Wilson died in the '80s, it seems likely that the rights were passed to her husband and then to Yvette. Regardless, the current owner of Gerald Gardner's literary estate has not come forward to claim their rights for more than thirty years. Several small presses and imprints (Magickal Childe, Godolphin House, Pentagram, IHO Books, Mercury Publishing) have successfully distributed reprints presumably without permission, and a myriad of similar outfits worldwide have made investigations into creating new editions only to be disappointed.

Kensington Publishing (Citadel) produced a new edition of *Witchcraft Today* in 2004. When I inquired regarding where they received the rights to publish the work, I received this response:

We would have gotten the rights by order of the United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of New Jersey since Carol Publishing (Citadel Press) went Bankrupt and Kensington acquired all their assets.

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<sup>19</sup> Greenfield, Allan, “The Secret History of Modern Witchcraft,” 1998, <  
<http://www.mindspring.com/~hellfire/wicca/>> (October 8, 2001);

Also in 2004, Weiser Books produced a new edition of *The Meaning of Witchcraft*. When I inquired, I received this response:

In 1971 Weiser did a hardcover edition of the Meaning of Witchcraft in association with The Aquarian Press of London. It is this edition that we reprinted in paperback. We do not control electronic rights nor do we have a contact for Gerald Gardner's estate.

Neither of the publishers of these two internationally distributed copies of Gardner's books has received information about the owner of Gardner's literary estate.

It seems that Gardner's literary rights are essentially lost—at least until the works pass into the public domain. This shouldn't prove too much of a problem to those seeking Gardner's works so long as small presses continue to produce under-the-radar editions and use the internet to distribute them successfully. However, the occasional rarity of reprints can cause prices to spike in strange ways. At the end of 2006, very cheaply produced Godolphin House editions of *High Magic's Aid* were being advertised for more than \$200. More than fifty years after Gardner first financed the publication of *High Magic's Aid* and hand-distributed copies, the book can still be hard to come by.

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