

Kerriann Godwin, ed., *The Museum of Witchcraft: A Magical History* (Bosccastle, Cornwall: The Occult Art Company, 2011), 142 pp., £34.00 (hardcover).

To the British Craft community, the Museum of Witchcraft, situated in the pretty coastal town of Boscastle, Cornwall, is something akin to a site of pilgrimage. Essentially unique in all of the United Kingdom, the museum, which was first opened on the Isle of Man in 1951, has had a troubled history, having to move site a total of three times since then, the result of often violent persecution from reactionary locals. Founded by Cecil Williamson, it initially benefited from the input of Gerald Gardner, the "Father of Wicca," until the two parted ways un-amicably in 1954. It moved to the current site in 1960, and at Halloween 1996 was purchased by Graham King, who continues to run it till this day. Although there are plans for the Centre of Pagan Studies to open another witchcraft-based museum in Brighton, the Museum of Witchcraft will undoubtedly continue to retain a special and irreplaceable place in the hearts of many in the British occult community.

To commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the museum's opening, this anthology has been published by The Occult Art Company, and contains contributions from no less than fifty-one individuals involved in the occult and Pagan communities. These range from the well known to the unknown, and include academics and independent researchers like Ronald Hutton, Dave Evans, and Philip Heselton, as well as near-legendary Pagan Witches such as Marian Green, Patricia Crowther, and Ralph Harvey. These are accompanied by entries supplied by a selection of individuals involved in the care and running of the museum and its collection, who here bring their own intimate experiences with the artefacts to a wider audience.

The idea of producing such an anthology was initially put forward by Judith Noble, chair of the Friends of the Museum of Witchcraft charity, and the ensuing work was subsequently edited by Kerrian Godwin, another Friend of the Museum, whilst Graham King and others then put the book together, doing an excellent job in creating an elegantly produced hardback. Limited to two hundred fifty copies, each personally signed by King himself, the book will undoubtedly become something of a collector's item in future years, with second-hand copies likely to rocket in price from the £34 at which it is currently priced.

As could be expected, the anthology is a mixed bag, with the articles varying in their quality and relevance to the subject at hand. Almost all of them are reminiscences of various Pagans' personal experiences at the museum, and as with any collection of anecdotes, many are humor-

ous and others genuinely moving. The result, however, is a book full of brimming praise for the museum (such praise is, in my opinion, certainly warranted) but in many respects unbalanced and lacking a critical perspective. Such is perhaps to be expected, however, for it is a work designed with the sole intention of celebrating and commemorating the museum's anniversary, not critically assessing it in any way. A study of the latter is still, I believe, something that would be of great benefit..

Accompanying the various personal reminiscences about the museum and its collection, there are also several fine examples of Pagan poetry published here that help to evoke imagery of witches in the reader's mind. The whole book is also beautifully illustrated throughout with good quality images taken directly from the museum collections, the majority of which have not been widely published elsewhere. Seeing some of the early posters for the museum is a treat, and in this respect it would be of interest to anyone fascinated with the early development of the Pagan Witchcraft religion..

One particularly interesting piece in the anthology is "How the Witchcraft Museum Came Into Being," originally written by Cecil Williamson in 1966. It was recently discovered amongst a bundle of handwritten notes, and the current museum staff are unaware of whether or not it has ever before been published, so its inclusion here is most welcome. Although it undoubtedly carries a bias towards Williamson's view of events, it is certainly of great interest to read a first hand account of the museum's early history straight from the horse's mouth. Of note is his discussion of the then recently deceased Gerald Gardner, for despite the animosity that had developed between the two, Williamson describes Gardner fondly in the text, forgiving him of his faults and characterising him as a "likeable personality." Unfortunately, this account is one of the few articles in the book to deal specifically with the museum's history (despite the anthology's subtitle of "A Magical History"), and I believe that a greater emphasis on this area, particularly with a more scholarly or academic bent, would have improved the work quite considerably. .

Whilst there is not a huge amount of new information provided in this anthology, it does shine light on aspects of the museum and on Williamson and King that are not widely available elsewhere in print, and for this alone it is valuable. Most importantly, however, this book provides us with a wonderful collection of accounts by esotericists—including witches, shamans, and ceremonial magicians—that recount their own, often deeply spiritual experiences with the museum. Although many of these accounts are a little repetitive, something which can prove somewhat frustrating to the reader, they are a testament to the power that certain artefacts and environments can have over the human mind. In

all, the book is certainly not something that will particularly appeal to large sectors of the world's Pagan community, and its limited edition status will prevent it from ever reaching a widespread audience, but it certainly has a resonance amongst those, myself included, for whom the museum will always be a very special place indeed.

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