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THE DRUID ORDERS

People in 18th century Britain took a great deal of interest in the Druids sparked by the writings of antiquarians such as John Toland and William Stukeley. It was pleasant to reflect that ancient Britain had not been peopled by savages but men of learning and wisdom that had rivalled, and even influenced, the Greek philosophers and the astrologers of ancient Persia. It was also thought then that the Druids had believed in one all-powerful God and a prophesied Redeemer; this made them seem almost like proto-Christians, and therefore thoroughly admirable. It was therefore only to be expected that orders would be formed based on the Druids; a 'Druid Society' was founded in Anglesey in 1790. However, this did not survive and the mainstream story of Druid orders in Britain begins in 1781 with the Ancient Order of Druids.

The Ancient Order of Druids

The AOD was founded in 1781 at the Old King's Arms Tavern in Poland Street, London, by a man named Hurler about whom nothing is certainly known, not even his given name; he has been tentatively identified as Henry Hurler, a builder and surveyor at Garlick Hill in London. Hurler invented a colourful legend that his order had been founded by one Togo Dubellinus, the offspring of a secret marriage between a Druid priestess and a noble bard who was killed resisting the Roman invasion of Britain. The new Order spread rapidly outwards from London, developing a national and provincial structure as it did so.

In 1833 a proposal was made to gain government approval and protection by becoming a registered friendly society, conforming to the Government regulations for such societies, submitting to Government audit, and offering fixed sickness, unemployment and other benefits to its members. The order split over this idea. Part of it broke away to become a friendly society, while the Ancient Order of Druids (AOD) continued unregulated under its original name.

As a purely fraternal society – which entailed some expense on the individual members and did not absolutely guarantee any benefits - the AOD seems to have consistently had a more affluent membership than the friendly society Druids, and from an early date it also had an 'inner' order, the Royal Arch. (Freemasonry also has an order called the Royal Arch but there is no connection between the two.) The Royal Arch met in 'chapters' rather than lodges, and its insignia included a silver triangle on a maroon neck-ribbon, with the motto FRIENDSHIP / FIDELITY / OBEDIENCE, or just F.F.O.

As a fraternal society, the AOD was not under the same pressure to admit women as the friendly society Druid orders were, and remained a single-sex order. In 1989 it joined a 'Council of British Druid Orders', an attempt to bring together different kinds of Druids including the 'neo-pagan' groups; but this did not prove fruitful and it left the Council in 1996.

The emblem of the AOD was in the form of a shield with three trees of an odd three-lobed shape, encircled by a collarette with jewel, supported by a warrior with shield and spear and a robed figure with crook. The crest was a male head & torso holding a club in his right hand and a three-lobed tree in his left. The supporting figures were not consistently on the same sides. The motto was either in French - Dieu, notre pays et Roi (or Reine, in Queen Victoria's reign) – or English: God, our Country & King (or Queen).

The Greek letters Tau Delta, standing for Togo Dubilinus appear on many badges of the order, particularly those for lodges.



AOD Jewel (1889)

AOD Royal Arch collar and jewels

AOD Royal Arch Jewel (1888)

The AOD faded from sight in the late 1990s; a group calling itself the Ancient Order of Druids has recently surfaced, but whether this is a revival or whether the Order has had a continuous existence is not clear.

The United Ancient Order of Druids

In 1833 the part of the AOD that broke away to become a registered friendly society renamed itself the 'United Ancient Order of Druids' (UAOD); It grew to become one of the biggest of the benefit societies. It acquired a strong membership in the colonies of the British Empire, where it formed an important support network for settlers; by 1895 it had 64,000 members worldwide, 25,595 of them in Australia alone. The UAOD called its lodges 'groves', in memory of the ancient Druids who had met in oak groves.

Like all the main benefit societies, toward the end of the 19th century the UAOD acquired juvenile lodges (for children and young people) and began to admit women to membership, in segregated all-female lodges.

The UAOD maintained its prominent position among British benefit societies until the creation of the Welfare State after the Second World War, when it went into steep decline and was finally wound up in 1999 (though Commonwealth orders of the UAOD, long since independent of the parent body, still have branches in the UK).

The emblem of the United Ancient Order of Druids was as for the AOD but with the motto UNITED TO ASSIST. They do not appear to have used the Tau Delta letters.

UNITED ANCIENT ORDER OF DRUIDS.



This is to Certify
that **Harold Louis Askew**
has received a vote of thanks for having passed
the Arch Druids Chair in Lodge N^o 632.
and that he is henceforth entitled to the distinction
and privileges of a Past Arch.

Signed this 17TH day of **Dec^r** 1934

H. L. Askew Secretary



Certificate of the United Ancient Order of Druids (note the emblem on the seal bottom left).

The OD

The Order of Druids was a benefit society created by secession from the UAOD in 1858. Its emblem was a scene with a cornucopia, lamb, fasces, Celtic cross and corn-sheaf in the foreground; a row of shields with national emblems of Britain , USA , Australia and India in the middle ground; Stonehenge in the background; a Druid with a harp and a Celtic warrior flanking, and oak branches overhead. The Druid and the warrior point with crook and staff respectively to a roundel containing seven circles overlain by a triangle, with the motto INTEGRITAS PRO RUPE NOBIS (United to Assist, but in Latin).

Links between the Druid Orders

In the interwar period 1919-1939 these three main Druid Orders considered themselves as sister organisations, with mutual membership and the right to attend each other's lodges – with the proviso that female members of the OD and UAOD could not attend lodges of the AOD, which did not admit women. A Congress of the three Orders was held annually.

Apart from these three main orders, at any time since the early 1800s there were always smaller Druid fraternal or benefit societies.

Regalia

The various groups of Druids in the nineteenth century used a full range of regalia and jewels, in a wide variety of styles and degrees of lavishness, and usually looked much like members of any other fraternal society. Up till 1891 the AOD wore aprons; after that date they abandoned them and kept the sash, collar and jewels only. In the early twentieth century some officers wore white robes and even false beards for their ceremonies, giving them a distinctive look.



Past Provincial Grand Arch Druid regalia (AOD) flanked by lodge jewels bearing the Tau-Delta

Druid lodges and chapters were headed by a Noble Arch Druid; this generally appears on jewels or regalia as NAD or simply NA. A Past Arch Druid was referred to as a PA. Other officials were Vice-Archdruid, Guardian, Bard, Director of Ceremonies, Secretary and sometimes a 'Minstrel'.

Further Reading:

Ronald Hutton, *The Druids* (London 2007)

Victoria Solt Dennis, *Discovering Friendly and Fraternal Societies: Their Badges and Regalia* (Shire Books, 2005)

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