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Charity Commission

Re The Druid Network

My qualifications for submitting this expert report regarding The Druid Network's application for registration as a charity are as follows:

I am Reader in Religious Studies at The Open University and have published extensively in monographs, edited collections and peer reviewed journals concerning Paganisms, including Druidry, indigenous religions and, to a lesser extent, Judaism. At the OU, I have produced distance learning teaching material about Paganisms, always including Druidry. In my previous positions (University of Winchester and University of Newcastle upon Tyne), I have also taught courses on this religious complex. (My publications are utilized in courses on "new religions", "new religious movements" or "contemporary religions" at University's worldwide.) I have presented papers at international academic conferences at least annually since the early 1990s. I have been a member of the panel that successfully proposed the addition of a "Contemporary Pagan Studies Group" to the academic program of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) (organizer of the largest annual Religious Studies and Theology conference globally) and contributed to panels on Paganisms, including Druidry, at the quinquennial congresses of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) (the largest international Religious Studies subject association in the world), including in Durban, South Africa (2000) and Tokyo, Japan (2005). The majority of my PhD

students have researched aspects of Paganism, including Druidry. One current student, for example, is examining the use and influence of mythic and imaginative literature on contemporary Druids, engaging in significant fieldwork among Druids in the east Midlands and internationally.

A full list of my publications is available on my websites — noted above, though these are about six months out of date due to delays caused by my father's death recently. One publication missing from that list (to day) is my chapter in the second edition of Rutledge's *Religions in the Modern World: Traditions and Transformations* (2009), edited by Linda Woodhead Hiroko Kawanami and Chris Partridge of the University of Lancaster (among the leading Religious Studies departments in the world). That chapter, entitled "Paganism" includes a significant vignette of contemporary Druid religious practice.

I am also Secretary of the British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR; Charity No. 801567; the leading Religious Studies subject association in the UK, and national member of the European Association for the Study of Religions and the IAHR). I note this because a key theme of my report is that the study of Druidry is an element in the current continuing discussion among scholars of religion about the definition, characteristics, performance and role of religions in the contemporary world. In short, if anything is a religion, Druidry is. It is this, among other reasons, because it is the subject of extensive critical study in academic departments and conferences concerned with "religion(s)" internationally.

Relevant literature and other material drawn on for my report:

In addition to my own publications and those of colleagues (e.g. the work of other scholars involved in the BASR, AAR, IAHR and other scholarly networks), I draw on over twenty years of ethnographic research among Druids and other Pagans, nature religionists and members of indigenizing religious movements. Three of my publications provide ample illustration of the kind of academic enquiries and outputs related to Pagan Druidry:

1. *Listening People, Speaking Earth: Contemporary Paganism*. London: Hurst & Co. 1997. Published simultaneously in Adelaide by Wakefield Press. Also by New York University Press under the title *Contemporary Paganism: Listening People, Speaking Earth*. Reprinted in 2000. Second, revised and updated edition, 2007.
2. *The Paganism Reader*. Edited with Chas S. Clifton; London: Routledge, 2004.
3. *Researching Paganisms*. Edited with Jenny Blain and Doug Ezzy; New York: Altamira, 2004.

Between them these provide resources for undergraduate, postgraduate and postdoctoral studies and debate about Paganism and all include discussion of contemporary Druidry.

I also want to draw attention to my monograph, *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (London: Hurst / New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) because this argues for a particular understanding of “animism” that contests earlier approaches and, importantly here, chimes with themes iterated in the Druid Network’s application. I will simply assume that I can use the term “animism” in line with current international ethnographic research and not skewed by Victorian notions of primitivism.

I will thus build on my own research, that of my research students and colleagues. I will only cite facts that I have certainty of, based on my researched and tested knowledge of contemporary Pagan Druidry.

It is important to note that there are vigorous debates about the definition and application of the word “religion” among scholars of religion today. However, none of these question the validity of labelling Druidry a religion (unless they question the validity of the term “religion” absolutely). There are, for example, scholars who willingly include entirely subjective and individualistic notions of spirituality among the phenomena they willingly categorise as “religions” for the purpose of academic study, research and debate. Such colleagues are clear that there is sufficient coherence among the varied expressions and experiences labelled as “Druidry” to be certain that this is a religious movement (not merely a loose amalgam of individualist fantasies). More significantly, scholars like Prof

Danielle Hervieu-Leger and Prof James Cox insist that for something to be a religion it must be communal. Cox's forthcoming revision of his *Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion* (Continuum, 2010) insists that "Religion refers to identifiable communities that base their acts of believing and their resulting communal experiences on postulated non-falsifiable alternate realities". While there are elements of this that are debateable (and I will later, implicitly at least, question some), the stress on "communities" that "postulate ... alternate realities" most certainly applies to Druidry. Whether it is possible to be a solitary Druid (and whether such an individual is a member of a religion) may be debated, but what is certain is that Druids typically gather together and form networks of various kinds. Most commonly, Druids form "Orders", taking this terminology from historic esoteric movements from which they, and all other Paganisms, diverged in the mid- to late-twentieth century. (I note that the term "Orders" has a longer lineage, esoteric groups deriving it from earlier Christian monastic/clerical movements. As I'll note, inheritance from esotericism or any other source does not determine the nature of a contemporary movement. Druidry is no more esoteric than it is monastic.) Precisely this process of divergence from esotericism, presents the strongest evidence of the formation of a "religion" of the kind most often recognized by the Charity Commission: a publically accessible body that cogently, coherently, seriously and with importance to itself and putatively to the world to which it offers benefits proposes an understanding of the world / cosmos or reality and ways of engaging with the world / cosmos or reality. In short, keeping focused on the centrality of "community", Druidry is a communal phenomena that brings together and moulds people with shared passions, interests, ideas and practices. It offers a complex range of ways of engaging with the world that shape possibly inchoate concerns into recognisable social / communal / corporate and embodied practices, movements and networks.

No serious scholar of religion today would advance or support the notion that religions are monolithic or fixed. The lived practice of all religions leads to diversity and some level of differentiation. In the case of religions with a dominant textual and creedal tradition these differences can be violently sectarian but they do not diminish diversity in lived reality. Vernacular, lived religion (the only kind there is in reality) is always fluid, permeable, contested, and diverse. In the practice of most "nature venerating" and "indigenising" religions, differences are actively celebrated as a necessary consequence of the local and embodied performance of shared worldviews and/or techniques of a

quite broad kind. The Lakota sun dance, for instance, is recognisable as a single kind of dance that expresses human vulnerability in a radically animate world of differentiated “powers” — but it is vitally important that each sun dance is, in performance and rhetoric, distinctive to some degree. Uniformity would not be true to the relational ontology of the traditional Lakota religious complex.

With these thoughts about religious community and diversity in mind, I have read The Druid Network’s constitutional statement, including its foreword which addresses the Charity Commission’s concerns about religions (coherence, cogency, public benefit, etc.). I am impressed by the careful clarity achieved here about what Druids have in common and, equally importantly, by the role and significance of diversity in the movement. It would only be mildly playful to insist that the celebration of diversity is the primary form Pagan religious coherence takes. In fact, this is a cogent, serious and important implication of Pagan Druidry’s focus on the celebration of the “natural” world. Diversity and coherence are equally products and causes of the Darwinian evolutionary world espoused by contemporary Druids as well as of what Cox calls religions’ “non falsifiable alternate realities”. That is, as Druids celebrate both trees of the kind that scientists like Dawkins can touch *and* tree-lore of a kind they would most likely reject, diversity must emerge out of the coherent unifying characteristics.

The Druid Network’s foreword helpfully provides clarity on the emergent religious common ground and celebrated divergences. I structure my comments following the Foreword’s seven point definition of Druidry:

1. All Druids necessarily share some notion that “Druid” derives from pre-Christian ancestral religious terminology of the British isles — including as these are represented (or misrepresented) in classical Roman and Christian literature. This is uncontentious. Neither is there any difficulty among Druids in acknowledging variations in understanding exactly what the title implies, its precise origins, or other related matters. Druids debate these differences of understanding and association without questioning the central affirmation of some kind of ancient and ancestral religious practice that links them, in some and various ways, to both land and ancestry.

2. Reverence for the land and ancestry, linked to but not determined by the limited historical and archaeological evidence of ancient religiosity in Britain, is determinative of all Druidic knowledge systems and practices. It is also, though not noted in the current document, a key theme in indigenous religious traditions — where, again, it manifests in varied local forms.

3. The “alternate realities” (to use Cox’s term) postulated by Druids are intimately related to the physical world and lead to embodied practice. That is, it is the “real” world of the current consensual scientific worldview that is celebrated among Druids (the world of rocks, trees, planets and microbes) but this world is understood as personal and animate in ways that are non-falsifiable and alternate to the dominant worldview. In some ways of defining “religion” it is this that makes Druidry a “religious” rather than a secular worldview. While I challenge the definitive necessity of alternate ideas for classification of “religions” (this seems an unfortunate hangover from insistence on “belief” in dominant Protestant inflected Enlightenment definitions of religion as non-rational, non-secular, non-material and interiorised), nonetheless, to a degree, “spiritual” representations are as rife among Druids as among devotees of more explicitly transcendentalist religions. Similarly, the prevalence of “otherworld” ideas in Druidry pushes the boundaries of the notion of the celebration of “nature”. It may, at least, chime more easily with the kind of definitions of religion that the Charity Commission is happy to utilise (i.e. those privileging non- or meta-empirical concerns).

4. The Druid Network rightly notes that some Druids prefer to think of their religion as a spirituality and imagine themselves to have escaped the pressures of institutionalisation. Happily, the Network recognises that these polemics are not constitutive of any incoherence among Druids. As a scholar of religion I am comfortable with people claiming not to be religious (I have indeed suggested this as a taxic indicator of religious rhetoric). Particular kinds of knowledges and ideas are noted in the Foreword as expressive of a cogent, coherent, serious and important religious worldview. The play between religion and spirituality is expressive of concerns about organisational structures that are open and beneficial to more than a core group. In this way, a “network” that is open to people with varying ideas about organisation is helpful. It is also commonplace

among Pagan groups and is not adopted merely as a convenient front for the current purposes.

5. The Foreword correctly points to the centrality of reverence for nature — and this should be glossed as indicating encouragement for personal responsibility in relation to a larger than human world, a world in which diverse other-than-human beings (to borrow a term from indigenous ethnographic theorising) are deemed worthy of consideration and even veneration at times. The inclusion of a variety of putatively metaphysical beings among beings indicated as being of importance for Druids (deities from various historic and cultural pantheons, ancestors, spirits of place, etc.) is again typical of Druidry. Some deities are more frequently named and venerated than others (those known from Irish, Welsh and Gallic lore and archaeology in particular) but just as Druidry seeks to benefit and attract a diverse human population so it does not bar a diverse divine and animistic community. Coherence is maintained, however, in the practice of ritual and bardic performance (storytelling, musicianship, poetic contest etc) by the structures of common protocols that make it easy to recognise a Druidic rather than any other kind of practice. This is not to deny the use of themes and practices shared by other religionists, only to insist that there is a Druid flavour that is detectable with some familiarity in the precise range of ways of Druid activity. For example, just as “prayer” (a specific form of address to the divine) is expressive of Christian and some other monotheistic religiosity, so “greeting” is expressive of Druidry and its intimation of human collaboration in dynamic “natural” processes.

6. The relationality expressed in the Foreword’s summary points to another element pervasive among indigenous and indigenizing religions. Here too is the strongest indication to me and other academic observers of the difference between contemporary Pagan Druidic religious movement and the esoteric movements which provided one important but not determinative originating root. Druidry includes a number of recognisable esoteric practices but has evolved these into an animist religious context. The personalist / animist religious worldview expressed here is quite different from the interiorised tendency of esotericism. The “self” of Paganism and Pagan Druidry is a relational self rather than an interiorised one.

It is also here, in the quest for “honourable relationship”, that we see both the foundation for public benefit and another marker of coherence within a diverse movement. Druidry is, as the Network says here, expressive of a religiously motivated concern for the world of humans and other-than-humans.

The Foreword’s worries about the term “sacrifice” nicely illustrate another unifying them in Druidry: the desire to both link to and differentiate from what texts allege about earlier Druids. It also nicely illustrates a typical Western / Enlightenment / post-Protestant “spiritualising” of words: sacrifice does not mean what it seems to mean, rather it means “benefiting others before oneself”. Whatever the limits of this rhetorical move, it does at least match the requirement that a registered charity must benefit others. Here’s the reason, now it is appropriate to ask “how?”.

7. The final characteristic noted by the Foreword to the Druid Network’s Constitution points to a typical emphasis on public ritual performance, especially at places deemed sacred or culturally and ancestrally significant, e.g. Stonehenge. Druids, in common with other Pagans, have not adopted preaching or tracting as modes by which their religion might be disseminated. In fact, few Druids aim to proselytise in any way. Nonetheless, they are keen that their foundational understanding of the value of the world (“nature”, physicality/materiality and embodiment) be celebrated. The precise means by which Druids celebrate and inculcate modes of respect towards those they consider divine and/or animate (their postulate alternate realities) are publically displayed and offered as inspirations to others. However, as the Foreword aptly illustrates, Druids are equally rarely interested in declaring only some knowledges and some practices either legitimate or effective. Thus, the final point of the Foreword claims that some “deeper mysteries and practices that would be confusing or detrimental to the novice are retained in the privacy of personal practice and close relationships”. Research about such claims regularly results in discussions about matters that are, in fact, never secret. What is privileged and offered by Druidry is encouragement to engage responsibly with a living world of larger than human importance. Anybody can do this — just as anybody can study botany or geology.

Druids assert that they have particular knowledges and practices that deserve study and careful integration into a lifeway rather than a hobby. What is insisted on here, in somewhat “religious” terminology, is the seriousness and importance of what Druids consider will benefit the world. Too much emphasis on ideas, for example, about communing with rocks or trees might either confuse people about Druidry’s coherent and cogent ideas about personal responsibility and the need for respect, or conversely, be detrimental in encouraging fantasies of personal and/or magical power of the kind rife in “Harry Potter” style media.

It should be clear that the success of the Druid Network in developing a network rather than a hierarchy is itself an expression of this last stated concern to encourage everyone to participate and, implicitly, to discourage the establishment of an elite or clerical class. Emphasis on personal practice and close relationships is commonplace in Druidry and illustrates the mature and careful thought put into the Network’s development of a form of Druidic organisation that deserves charitable status.

In addition to these reflections arising from the Network’s Foreword, I might note further that there has been and continues to be considerable debate among academics about the use of the term “nature”. This is true not only in relation to Druids and other Pagans but is significant in relation to the underlying themes of modernity, e.g. the dualism of mind and body in Cartesian thought that is a foundation — though now certainly a contested one — of academic rationality and scientific pursuits. It is important, then, to note that while Druids and other Pagans rightly point to the definitive centrality of the celebration of “nature” in their religion, and while academics typically label Paganisms and indigenous religions “nature religions”, the notion of “nature” is far from unambiguous. Adherents will frequently assert that “there is nothing outside of nature” or “all we venerate is natural”. But this is not a Cartesian nature, let alone a mechanical one. It is far more the kind of animist worldview that exists in tension with that idea. Indications of this are visible in references to “otherworlds” and to beings not found in any rationalist evolutionary taxonomy. In their own knowledge system there is clearly nothing unnatural about these realms or beings. However, things look different when addressed towards the still dominant discourse in which “nature” is (a) merely material and neither conscious nor spiritual, and (b) separate from humanity (as indicated by the separation of

the “natural” from the “social” sciences as if badgers aren’t social and botanists aren’t natural). This is all to argue that “natural” is a complex word that carries diverse meanings that are not always evident to different speakers and hearers. In Druidry it clearly refers to a religious significant world even when it includes trees, rocks, springs, seasons, planets and so on.

I offer this expert report without qualification: it includes reflections based on published ethnographic research and debate, and would be uncontentious in any academic forum interested in such basic descriptions and initial analysis of what is interesting about Druidry. It is a clear fact that Druidry is treated as a religion in the curriculum of departments of Religious Studies internationally. Both unifying factors and significant diversities are important in all religions and Druidry is unexceptional in both directions. Furthermore, Druidry is a religion not only for academic purposes but also matches the Charity Commission’s requirements both for defining “religion” and with reference to public benefit. Had the Commission not embraced the understanding that “religion” is not defined by “belief in God” (an unfortunate hangover from Protestant Christian hegemonic polemic) I would still have noted that many Druids acknowledge that there is an underlying unity to the cosmos that many are willing to identify as “God” or “Goddess” or “Great Spirit” or “Great Mystery” or some other label matching those of other phenomena accepted as religions by the Commission. However, now that the Commission has recognised the diversity of that which can be labelled “divine” and therefore as “religious” I have been able to attend to the increasingly common Druidic stress on more polytheistic and animistic intimations of the nature of the cosmos.

I fully understand that in preparing and presenting this report to the Commission I have a duty to help the Commission reach an informed decision based on matters within my expertise and without reference to obligations (not that I have any) to the Druid Network or its representatives who asked me to submit this report.

I confirm that insofar as the facts stated in my report are within my own knowledge I have made clear which they are and I believe them to be true, and that the opinions I have expressed represent my true and complete professional opinion.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graham Harvey', with a stylized, cursive script.

Dr Graham Harvey
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