

# A Personal History of the Pagan Alliance

By Julia Phillips

The 'Ritual Satanic Abuse' scare in England and Scotland in the 1980s was, strangely enough, behind the founding of the Pagan Alliance. I had seen first hand how easy it was for manipulative people to spread unsubstantiated claims that pagans and witches were conducting black masses, child sacrifice, and so on. These people were at first frighteningly successful, but fortunately investigative journalist Rosie Waterhouse played a key role in discrediting beliefs about satanic ritual abuse. Her findings were also supported by a Government enquiry commissioned by the Health Secretary and conducted by Professor Jean La Fontaine:

*A report ordered by Mrs Virginia Bottomley, the Health Secretary, said Christians campaigning against new religious movements had been "a powerful influence encouraging the identification of Satanic abuse".*

*They were joined by psychologists and childcare workers who engineered the hysteria which led to children being taken from their parents in Rochdale, Nottingham, and Orkney.*

*Of 84 cases examined by the researchers, however, no evidence was found to justify any allegation of Satanic abuse and only three claims of ritual abuse were substantiated. Professor Jean La Fontaine, the report's author, said that even these three cases did not merit the description of ritual abuse as the desire for sex was more important than the element of ritual.*

*"I think the evangelicals created the climate in which people could believe this sort of thing was happening" she said.*

*"People began thinking that perhaps it was something they hadn't seen because they hadn't looked and though they had better start looking. That argument is mistaken because we are not talking about a different kind of abuse. It is the same old sexual abuse."*

*Prof La Fontaine added: "In these cases, the children were worryingly disturbed. It was easy to make a mistake by assuming that, because the children were so damaged, what had happened to them must have been so much worse than normal sexual abuse".*

*She said claims that the children themselves alleged Satanic and ritual abuse were false. "The fact is that the small children didn't actually say these things. They said bits and pieces that were picked up by the adults."*

*"You can never say that something doesn't exist. All I can say is that there is no evidence in the cases I have examined."*

*Prof La Fontaine's report was welcomed by Mrs Bottomley, who said there had been "speculating and scaremongering" for years. Calling on professionals to study it, she said: "Professor La Fontaine has abused the myth of Satanic abuse". The 36-page study, called The Extent and Nature of Organised and Ritual Abuse, was commissioned in 1991 after children were removed from their homes in Rochdale and Orkney.*

*It defines ritual abuse as "sexual abuse where there have been allegations of ritual associated with the abuse, whether or not these allegations have been taken any further or tested in the courts". Satanic abuse is defined as "a ritual directed to worship of the Devil".* (London Daily Telegraph/June 3, 1994 by Hugh Muir)

You may be wondering what all this had to do with founding the Pagan Alliance! I happened to be staying with Wiccan friends in Canberra in 1991, and one of these manipulative people appeared on TV, spreading the usual unsubstantiated claims that pagans and witches were conducting black masses, child sacrifice, and so on. These were the same old claims that had inspired the scaremongering in England and Scotland.

I was only partly listening (having heard it all before), but my friends were all utterly shocked by what they heard, and started talking about ways to make sure the pagan community could identify 'Satanic abuse' within Australia. When I told them that all these claims were fraudulent and simply an evangelical Christian attempt to discredit paganism, they were sceptical and pointed out how much 'evidence' (sic) the woman being interviewed had provided. That alerted me to a very real danger: ignorance about the recent events in England and Scotland meant that Australian pagans were not prepared to counter the threat that it posed. I knew it was a scam because I'd seen it play out in England and Scotland before I left, but pagans in Australia didn't have access to a good communication network to learn about the truth behind the myth, and reports had limited (if any) exposure in the mainstream Australian media. This was in the days before widespread BBS, let alone email and the World Wide Web, and Australian pagans were really quite isolated from what was happening elsewhere in the pagan world.

I had been a member of the Pagan Federation in England for many years, which had a section called the Pagan Anti-Defamation League. The President was a close friend, and so I spoke with her about setting up a similar organisation in Australia to provide a means to disseminate important information throughout the pagan community. During the winter of 1991 the basic structure of the Pagan Alliance was drafted, together with its motto, objectives, and logo. It was formally launched at the Australian Wiccan Conference in Spring of that year. The name was the Pan Pacific Pagan Alliance, as we hoped to include New Zealand fairly quickly.

*"Strength Through Diversity"* was chosen as the motto to represent our aims to be a strong network inclusive to all pagan paths, and the PPPA (as it was known) became Australia's first formal networking and information organisation for pagans. Its structure was loosely modelled on the Pagan Federation (for example, the three Pagan Principles were adopted from the PF), but its operational structure was unique to Australia. The PPPA was intended to operate on a State basis, with each State managed by three Coordinators drawn from three different pagan traditions, with a central Coordinator based in Sydney. The idea was to ensure that no single pagan sect would have an undue influence, but unfortunately, although the principle was sound the Pagan population simply wasn't diverse or large enough to support that management model. In practice, getting just one Coordinator in a State was a major achievement! The State Coordinators have always been, and remain, the backbone of the Pagan Alliance however, and their contributions over the years have been outstanding.

The newsletter *Pagan Times* had an important role to play in achieving the goals of the PPPA, as it was the primary vehicle for members to communicate with each other, and to read about matters of interest to the pagan community. *Pagan Times* was one of the key benefits offered to members in those early days, and was at the forefront of a number of initiatives for pagans within Australia.

Michael Freedman (now sadly deceased) took up the task of promoting the PPPA in New Zealand, and as a result there was a healthy influx of members from across the Tasman. The PPPA went from strength to strength but I decided to take a step back as it was becoming obvious that people were associating the organisation with me personally. That was never the intention and I thought it would be easier for the PPPA to develop its own identity if I was not involved anymore. Phil Day (Victoria) and Gerald Osgood (WA) both took over the main Coordinating role for brief periods, and then it came back to me again before passing to Jon and Chel Bardell in NSW. Jon and Chel steered the PPPA for a number of years, making a couple of significant changes to its structure. Firstly, the name of the organisation was changed to the *Australian Pagan Alliance* and it was incorporated in NSW; secondly, *Pagan Times* was separated from the organisation entirely. This meant that members no longer received a copy through their membership of the Pagan Alliance, it became a subscription only magazine. State Coordinators were encouraged to produce their own local newsletters for networking and dissemination of information, and membership fees for the PA also became State-based at that time.

In 1999, Chel and Jon decided it was time to move on to other things, and asked for volunteers to take on the administration of the *Pagan Alliance*, and editing/publishing *Pagan Times*. Enter me again, this time with Ambriel and Hiraeth. We established the Pagan Alliance as an incorporated body in Victoria (the previous incorporation in NSW had been allowed to lapse), and set up a formal committee comprising President (Ambriel), Treasurer (me), Secretary (Hiraeth), Public Officer (Kira White), and one other elected member (Morag). This team worked well, but my own involvement came to an end (again!) in 2003, when editorial/publishing responsibility for *Pagan Times* passed to Allannah Turner in Tasmania, along with the role of Treasurer for the PA Inc. Ambriel and Hiraeth continued in their roles, with the Public Officer role passing to Colin Beeforth when Kira moved to Tasmania. Kira was one of the very first members of the Pagan Alliance at its inception, and she has devoted hours of work to the organisation over the years. Of course she is not alone in that, all the volunteers who work to support and promote the PA work hard, but few have done so for as long or as successfully as Kira.

Following in the footsteps of the *Pagan Alliance* other pagan organisations have been established in Australia in recent years, and the environment now is very different to what it was at the beginning of the 1990s. It has been a privilege to be involved with the PA and the people who have helped to make it such a wonderful organisation, and I am sure it will continue to provide a service to pagans in Australia for many years to come.

Julia Phillips  
Founder, Pagan Alliance  
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## About the Author

Julia Phillips has been studying the occult since 1971, when she began to attend lectures at the Society of Psychical Research in London. In 1975 she obtained her first tarot deck, and it was through the study of the tarot that she met the High Priestess of the London coven into which she was initiated.

She emigrated to Australia in 1988, and lived in Sydney for eight years before moving to Melbourne. She returned to live in her family home in the Cotswolds area of England at the beginning of 2005.

Julia is currently co-editor of *"The Wiccan"*, and previously edited and published *"Children of Sekhmet"* (1986-1990), and *"Web of Wyrd"* (1990-1993). In 1991 she founded the Pagan Alliance Inc. and its magazine, *"Pagan Times"*, which is now in its 15th year of continuous publication.

She is the author of *"The Witches of Oz"* (Capall Bann, 1994), a guide to the practice of Wicca in the southern hemisphere, and wrote the chapter *"The Magical Universe"* for *"Practising the Witch's Craft"* edited by Douglas Ezzy (Allen & Unwin, 2003). She is also a contributor to *"Bast and Sekhmet: Eyes of Ra"* by Storm Constantine and Eloise Coquio (Hale, 1999); *"The Encyclopedia of Modern Witchcraft and Neo-Paganism"* by Shelley Rabinovitch and James Lewis (Citadel Press, 2002); and *"POP! Goes the Witch"* edited by Fiona Horne (Disinformation Company Ltd, 2004).