



# WitchFest

## BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE PAGAN COMMUNITY

11<sup>th</sup> September 2023

### **A response to the proposed Asatru Folk Assembly Winter Nights event at Stonehenge**

Paganism is the 7th largest religion in the UK. According to the 2021 Census Paganism grew by 34% in 10 years, making it the second fastest-growing religion, compared to size, in the UK<sup>i</sup>.

Emboldened by an increasingly conservative and traditionalist political landscape<sup>ii</sup>, racially exclusive right-wing extremist groups such as the Asatru Folk Assembly (AFA)<sup>iii iv</sup> are making use of this renaissance in an attempt to establish a foothold and some semblance of validity in the UK.

The AFA was founded in the US by Stephen McNallen, a self-proclaimed 'racial separatist' who espouses his neo-völkisch<sup>v</sup> pseudo-scientific theory of metagenetics<sup>vi</sup>, a combination of biological determinism and eugenics which claims that Heathenry can only be practiced by those of white Northern European heritage<sup>vii</sup>. Both McNallen and his predecessor Matt Flavel promote David Lane's 14 Words<sup>viii</sup> among their core tenets<sup>ix x</sup>.

The AFA openly and proudly promote a racist<sup>xi</sup>, homophobic<sup>xii</sup>, misogynistic<sup>xiii</sup> and antisemitic<sup>xiv</sup> interpretation of contemporary Germanic Paganism that is abhorrent to the law-abiding and inclusive Pagans and Heathens of the UK represented by the groups who have co-authored this correspondence.

The AFA employ 'folk builders', members who recruit and radicalise others into their extremist and racially exclusive interpretation of Heathen Paganism<sup>xv</sup>. Folk builders are employed to access Pagan communities, the armed forces<sup>xvi</sup>, emergency services<sup>xvii</sup>, and the prison system<sup>xviii</sup> in an attempt to recruit members and establish a presence in institutions that pose a significant threat to national security.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of September 2023, newly appointed AFA folk builder James Saunders posted on Twitter/X that the AFA will be hosting its *first* Winter Nights event at Stonehenge on 28<sup>th</sup> of October 2023 at 7pm<sup>xix</sup>.

We cannot allow the AFA to desecrate a symbol of our cultural heritage and a site of spiritual significance to Pagans across the UK with their imported brand of racist, homophobic, misogynistic, and anti-Semitic Paganism that shares nothing with the inclusive contemporary iteration of British Paganism, and which is fundamentally incompatible with the wonderfully diverse multicultural communities of the UK.

The latest iteration of the PREVENT Duty Guidance rightfully identifies extreme right-wing ideology as a resurgent<sup>xx</sup> and significant threat to national security, however, the AFA differs from the definition provided, in that they are an organised hierarchical group with territorial ambitions<sup>xxi</sup>.

Permitting the AFA to openly promote themselves by way of a public event at Stonehenge would assist them in establishing a foothold in the UK and providing the foundation they need to perpetuate their divisive and extremist narratives that will only contribute to the already increasing risk posed by extreme right-wing terrorism in the UK.

We would like assurances from the agencies and statutory bodies responsible for protecting the safety and integrity of Stonehenge that they will assess this event and consider their duties under PREVENT and work in partnership to address this issue to prevent a symbol of national heritage being co-opted as a symbol of extremist far-right hate and division.

The Pagan and Heathen bodies represented herein would like to take this opportunity to declare that Paganism, including the contemporary Germanic Paganism known as Heathenry, is open to anyone regardless of their age, disability, neurodiversity, gender identity, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, and that we wholly reject the racist, homophobic, misogynistic and anti-Semitic interpretation of Paganism promoted by the AFA as incompatible with our tenets and values, and those of the wonderfully diverse multicultural foundations of the UK."

This correspondence is endorsed by representatives of the following inclusive Pagan and Heathen organisations, on behalf of the UK Pagan and Heathen religious community:

**The Police Pagan Association**

**The Pagan Federation**

**Asatru UK**

**Witchfest**

**Children of Artemis**

**Vanatru UK**

**The Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids**

**The Defence Pagan Network**

**The Clan of the Dolmen Grove**

**The Confederation of UK Heathen Kindreds**

**Pagan Seminary**

**Pagan Aid**

**Life Rites**

**The British Druid Order**

**The Druid Network**

**Hendon Heathens**

**Kith of the Tree and the Well**

**Dawn of the Oak**

**The Doreen Valiente Foundation**

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- <sup>i</sup> Office of National Statistics “Religion (detailed) TS031” Census 2021, published 29<sup>th</sup> November 2022  
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS031/editions/2021/versions/1>
- <sup>ii</sup> MSNBC “White-only religious groups aren't new to America. Trump's helped reinvigorate them” MSNBC.com, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023  
<https://www.msnbc.com/opinion/white-only-religious-groups-aren-t-new-america-trump-s-n1251624>
- <sup>iii</sup> Anti-Defamation League “Asatru Folk Assembly” ADL.com, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023  
<https://extremismterms.adl.org/glossary/asatru-folk-assembly-afa>
- <sup>iv</sup> Southern Poverty Law Centre “Asatru Folk Assembly” splcenter.org, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023  
<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/asatru-folk-assembly>
- <sup>v</sup> Southern Poverty Law Centre “neo-völkisch” splcenter.org, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023  
<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/neo-volkisch>
- <sup>vi</sup> Stephen McNallen “The Philosophy of Metagenetics, Folkism and Beyond” runestone.org, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023  
<https://www.runestone.org/product/the-philosophy-of-metagenetics-folkism-and-beyond/>
- <sup>vii</sup> Asatru Folk Assembly “Declaration of Purpose: II. The Preservation of the Ethnic European Folk and their Continued Evolution” runestone.org, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023  
<https://www.runestone.org/declaration-of-purpose/>
- <sup>viii</sup> Anti-Defamation League “14 Words” ADL.com, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023  
<https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/14-words>
- <sup>ix</sup> Asatru Folk Assembly “Statement of Ethics: IV. The Family Principle” runestone.org, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023  
<https://www.runestone.org/statement-of-ethics/>
- <sup>x</sup> The Guardian “Inside America’s Last Whites-Only Church” (0:38-0:43) accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOfUz-4sg1U>
- <sup>xi</sup> Dirty South Right Watch “The Nazi Heathen AFAir: The Asatru Folk Assembly and their Southern racist foothold” accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023  
<https://dirtysouthrightwatch.org/2021/nazi-heathens-fl/>
- <sup>xii</sup> Ceallaigh MacCath-Moran “A Response to the Asatru Folk Assembly’s Position on Race and Gender” csmaccath.com, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023  
<https://csmaccath.com/blog/response-asatru-folk-assemblys-position-race-and-gender>
- <sup>xiii</sup> Shane Burley “Asatru’s Racist Missionary: Stephen McNallen, Defend Europe, and the Weaponization of Folkish Heathery” abeautifulresistance.org, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023  
<https://abeautifulresistance.org/2017/09/14/asatrus-racist-missionary-stephen-mcnallen-defend-europe-and-the-weaponization-of-folkish-heathery/>
- <sup>xiv</sup> Hrafnar.org “Hrafnar’s Declaration of Support for Inclusive Heathenry” hrafnar.org, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023  
<https://hrafnar.org/about-us/declaration-127/>
- <sup>xv</sup> Asatru Folk Assembly “Folk Builder” runestone.org, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023 <https://www.runestone.org/?s=folk+builder>
- <sup>xvi</sup> Asatru Folk Assembly “AFA Soldier’s Edda and Veteran’s Resource Guide” amazon.com, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023  
<https://www.amazon.com/Soldiers-Edda-Veterans-Resource-Guide/dp/1543076955>
- <sup>xvii</sup> Tablet Magazine “Pagans in Uniform” tabletmag.com, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023  
<https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/community/articles/pagans-in-uniform>
- <sup>xviii</sup> Asatru Folk Assembly “AFA Prison Ministry” runestone.org, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023  
<https://www.runestone.org/prison-ministry/>

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<sup>xix</sup> James Saunders “@Hangis23” Twitter.com, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023

<https://twitter.com/Hangis23/status/1700150969567244368>

<sup>xx</sup> HM Government “Prevent Duty Guidance: Guidance for Specified Authorities in England and Wales. 22. Threat and Risk” Gov.uk, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023

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<sup>xxi</sup> HM Government “Prevent Duty Guidance: Guidance for Specified Authorities in England and Wales. 24. Threat and Risk” Gov.uk, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023

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