



*"I decided it was time to try and track them down."*



## My Journey into the Heart of a Real Secret Society

BY PHILIP GARDINER

GERMANY HAS SEEN THE rise and fall of many secret societies and has harbored or fostered the growth of more than most European countries. From the Rosicrucians to the Order to the Golden Dawn, from the Freemasons to the early days of the Nazi Party, Germany has had its fair share of intrigue. The Catholic Church and even the established Nazi Party had tried in vain to stamp them out, but the fire created by the methods of secret societies is difficult to quench. No sooner has it been stamped out in one place than it starts up again in another, like a forest fire that refuses to die.

One secret society with such a voracious fire was the Holy Vehm. This unique society had for centuries brought fear to the German people, both powerful and weak. It was open in its goal – revolution – and its vigilance was such that the name of the Holy Vehm was known across the world. Although they were believed to have disappeared at the end of the 16th century, their symbol of a red cross on a white

background survives to this day in the International Committee of the Red Cross and their disappearance seems to have occurred at the same time as the appearance of the Rosicrucians (Rosy or Red Cross). Members even saw themselves as 'seers' and 'illuminés' (Wissend or Wise Ones) and outsiders were known as those 'who had not seen the light.'

But what was their origin and how did they become so feared?

The standard orthodox history claims that by the middle of the 13th century and at the height of Templar power, Westphalia in Germany was suffering from a state of lawlessness and oppression from loosened warriors, mercenaries and bands of outlaws. It seemed no innocent man could travel between the rivers Rhine and Weser and so the Chivalrous Order of the Holy Vehm or Fehm was secretly created to counter this state of affairs. It was in fact created by ex-outlaws and freemen who now had families and business concerns of their own to

worry about and so with the initial backing and aid of the Holy Church they took up arms and horse and chased down the tyrants. Eventually however the Holy Vehm began to take the law into their own hands and held secret sessions wherein they judged those they had caught and sentenced them often to death. In fact the term fehme or vehme is derived from the Latin fama, a law of common or agreed form. It can also mean to be 'set apart', just as they saw themselves. Fehm can also mean 'black' or 'wisdom.'

During this time secrecy was paramount because of reprisals from the outlaws and soon oaths and rituals were part of the bargain. For instance, during the initiation the candidate would swear on oath to kill himself and his family should he reveal himself to be a member of the Holy Vehm. The Judge or Stuhlherren would then place his sword across the candidate's throat and draw a few drops of blood to seal the oath and serve as a reminder of the judgement he would receive. The initiate would then kiss the cross on



the hilt. These oaths were taken at receptions, which were often held in caves or the depths of the forest and went something like this:

*"I swear to be faithful to the secret Tribunal, to defend it against myself, against water, sun, moon, stars, foliage of trees, all living beings, all that God has created between heaven and earth; against father, mother, brothers, sisters, wife, children, finally all men, the head of the Empire alone excepted; to uphold the judgement of the secret tribunal, to aid in its executions and denounce to the present or any other secret Tribunal all misdemeanors against its jurisdiction, which may come to my knowledge..."*

Although the 'receptions' were held at night and sometimes in caves, the actual judgements were in open public places and often in the morning, as dawn broke.

Within the space of a few short years the Holy Vehm had initiated nearly a quarter of a million freemen and commoners, each one sworn to eradicate heresy, traitors, lawbreakers and to uphold the Ten Commandments and going well beyond their initial reason for forming. Because of this amazing rise to power, secrecy became less and less a problem and soon judgements were made openly in public places such as town halls and market squares. That said, these judgements or Heimliches Gericht, were always held at midnight. Because these judgements almost always resulted in execution those charged more often than not tried to escape and fled the country. That was not the end of the matter and soon the mighty

arm of the Holy Vehm reached far and wide and special executioners were sent to hunt the outlaws down and kill them without trial.

Eventually such lawlessness itself became too much for the Church and State to ignore and the Holy Vehm once again went underground as they were closed off by the officialdom by the end of the 16th century. Indeed it seems the rot may have set in from before the end of the 15th century as no less than three court sessions summoned the Emperor himself, who of course refused to turn up. On the surface though by 1568 they had ceased to exist and little more was heard from them. They remained, hidden and secret, being heard of in the early 19th century when the French under Jerome Bonaparte legislated against them at Munster. But they re-emerged again with true vengeance in the 1930's during the Nazi dominated period of Germany, this time focusing on the Jewish 'heresy' and doing much of Hitler's dirty work. By almost all accounts the Vehm disappeared at the same time as the Nazi's, but there is more...

Through my own contacts in various secret societies I decided it was time to try and track them down, to see if indeed they still existed. I first called on a friend I had in the Ordre Templi Orientis, a secret society partially recreated by that anti-Christ himself, Aleister Crowley. It was late in the evening when I finally arrived in a little village in Surrey and I was hungry and thirsty. The rain was beating down hard like it

always does in the British summer-time and I ran from the car, across the gravel forecourt and banged on the white Edwardian front door. I could see the lights inside flickering through the rain that almost blinded me and I was overjoyed as the door swung wide and my old friend ushered me in. Within minutes I was sat before a log fire with a large glass of wine, listening to all the latest 'insider' gossip. I was surprised to find that most recent intrigue was about the then new Pope Benedict and how the Spanish and French had been arguing over who should follow him.

Eventually though we got around to my mission and my friend immediately knew who to contact – in fact he was positively excited by the prospect of finding out himself. Going through a Golden Dawn contact in Berlin he was able to find out that the Vehm – or at least a modern re-creation of them – were alive and well in Germany to this day. I wanted more and so I pushed him to check that these weren't just pseudo-Nazi's. He checked and word came back that these guys were in fact not modern day versions of the Chivalrous Order of the Holy Vehm, but were in fact a continuance of the very same medieval order that supposedly disappeared finally in the late 1940's. I was invited over to Berlin to speak with them and so I accepted.

Within days I was on a plane to Berlin, a city I had never visited before. I flew alone and with only hand luggage, a camera, recording equipment and a map.



Berlin is the capital of Germany and is a vibrant and very cosmopolitan place. There are still back streets that evoke a sense of the cold war, especially closer to the old border, but as a whole it appears fresh and newly built. My very first impressions were simply that it was ordered and clean.

I landed late in the afternoon and made my way to the hotel. I was set to meet three English speaking Germans the following day at the Altes Museum, the Berlin Dome at Lustgarten. I slept, woke, had breakfast, which wasn't so pleasant and then had the concierge order me a cab. By 11am I was outside the beautiful Berlin Dome building awaiting the three gentlemen. I had no idea what they looked like, but I was assured they would know me and so I stood taking pictures of the building and enjoying the German sun. I did not wait long as I was tapped on the shoulder by an elegant looking old gentleman with short gray hair and a dark suit. Behind him were two others, similarly gray with one in a tweed style jacket and the other in short sleeves. They all smiled at me and I was quickly put at ease.

"Come, let us drink." Said the man who had tapped me on the shoulder and with a large grin on his face he led me away a short distance to a waiting car – a large black Mercedes.

We drove for a while through the bustling streets and out of Berlin's center. I was asked not to take pictures and to swear on oath that I would not reveal their true identities. I had little choice but to promise or otherwise I would surely have

been back to England on the next flight. Eventually we arrived at a small café where it seemed the three elderly gentlemen were well-known and they were welcomed with what looked like to me almost Masonic handshakes. We sat, ordered coffee and I noted how each of the three men sat almost solemnly and turned their knives, forks and spoons towards the center of the table in an almost ritual fashion. I was only later to discover that this indeed had been an ancient secret sign of the Holy Vehm to others in the room.

All three men spoke perfectly good English and so I had no problem communicating with them. I probed them for their backgrounds. They had all fought during the Second World War as young men and somehow survived. All three had been officers and had come together during the war as they were asked to join the Vehm. They were unashamed of their past and told me with total confidence and almost contempt that they would fight again to restore power to the Fatherland and rid Europe of the 'scourge' as they called the Jewish race. I was shocked to find such anti-Semitism still alive, although I probably should not have been. It turned out that they had become members of the Vehm during the war and had even held secret judgments against the 'oppressors' of the German people in the woods of Germany and France. After the war they and others maintained the membership of the Vehm and they claimed that it was still very much alive and well today in Germany and Austria and was in fact growing within the anti-European

contingents. They themselves had initiated many hundreds of younger Germans in the last few years and each of them were Freigraf or court presidents, although judgments were few and far between these days.

I asked why they had allowed me to meet with them as surely they must have known that I would wish to report on the meeting. They replied that their oaths were pure as they had not revealed their true identities and were revealing no new secrets, other than the contemporary existence of the Holy Vehm.

My time with these gentlemen was one of mixed emotions. On the one hand I was almost afraid that they may take me off into some dark wood and exercise their judgement against me and on the other I was excited by the whole intrigue. It felt a little like a James Bond movie – meeting outside a museum, being driven off in a black Mercedes and talking about wartime exploits behind enemy lines. At the end of our meeting we said goodbye and I was driven back to my hotel where I simply couldn't rest through excitement. The next day I was back in the UK and life returned to normal, but I couldn't help but wonder about those words of Rudolf Steiner from the early 20th century:

*"The only nation in the world that knows right from wrong is the German nation, and Germany must fulfil her mission, otherwise European civilization will be ruined."* —Dr. Rudolf Steiner, Stuttgart, 1918.

