

House Mercere in the Stonehenge Tribunal

If players' characters set up a covenant in the Stonehenge Tribunal, they can expect to be visited once per year by a non-Gifted Mercere redcap, Hawys the Widow.

If they wish to seek out House Mercere, there is also a barely-functional Mercere House / Mercer House just outside the walls of York, run by Henryk "of York".

There are also four other Mercere members in and around the Tribunal. Characters may naturally come in contact with one or more, depending on how their covenant is set-up:

- Uda of Bruges will visit friendly, coastal covenants
- Leofric or his agents may be encountered by characters who engage in trade around the Tribunal's towns
- Gilbert Tacent may take an interest in magi who seem to threaten the covenant of Burnham or its schemes
- Brainus the Swift will offer his services to any covenant which seems wealthy, spendthrift, or foolish

Members

Henryk of York

Henryk is a non-magical Mercere. He is Henryk "of York" only in that he lives there, just outside the walls – he was actually born in Flanders (in Bruges, as was his sister, Uda, who is also a redcap). He spent ten years wandering the western Rhine and the Stonehenge Tribunals, before settling at the York Mercer House as its overseer and administrator. If the players' characters hear from him at all it will probably be because he sends messages from time to time asking for "donations to help with the upkeep of the Mercer House". He lives a comfortable life, with two servants, his long-suffering wife, and numerous children (all of which are his, some of them by his wife). He maintains a poorly-run and rarely frequented boarding house attached to the Mercer House, which clearly makes little money (members of the Order may stay for free), but he enjoys fine clothes, good wines, and donating money to the poor (especially poor attractive young women).

Once, he was a charming and athletic wanderer with a twinkle in his eye and a sweet word for the damsels; now he is a fat, balding lecherous layabout with a very poor reputation in the city. But still, he maintains the Mercer House, more-or-less, and thrives on the anonymous patronage of the covenant of Burnham (which wants to keep him loyal, and finds silver an easy and low-profile way to buy his favour).

Roleplaying Notes: Henryk is “slightly too friendly”. Lean forward. Talk mainly to female characters. Wink cheekily (or creepily). Suggested catchphrase: “Some more wine...?”

Leofric the Mercer

Leofric lives apart from any Covenants, in Winchester. The name he has chosen is an apt pun – “Mercer” is the English word for a merchant in fine fabrics, which he is; and he is a non-magical member of Mercere. He does wear a red cap (of the finest wool, with a couple of dashing feathers), but only to travel between his townhouse and any neighbours’ feasts. But he certainly does not deliver messages. Idealistic magi who expect redcaps to be out and about serving the Order might challenge him on his sedentary life, and for them he has a ready answer: it is more efficient for him to maintain a network of agents listening for magical rumours, than for him to plod about seeking rumours himself. But that, of course, is an evasion.

It is true that he carefully collects rumours of magical events, and especially rumours of magical items, which he will happily buy for silver and then sell to magi for vis (he stockpiles vis so he can pay someone to create longevity rituals for himself and his family). Indeed, if magi hear from him, it will probably be because he has found an interesting artefact which he is asking them to bid on. He does also, it is true, run a network of agents – but they are commercial agents who buy and sell for him, and who listen for rumours only as an afterthought. He has people in London, Oxford, Southampton and Bristol, and his travelling assistants will move as far afield as the great Champagne fairs and the notoriously crime-infested Chester fair.

But ultimately, Leofric has no interest in serving the Order, nor speaking to its members at all (unless to make money from them). His interests are in luxury and the social advancement of his children (one of whom, aided by a suitable donation, has just been appointed as Prior at a nearby monastery, and another of whom has just married her way into one of London’s leading merchant families.) Should anyone give him a message to deliver, the best they can hope for is that he will lock it in a box until another redcap (probably Hawys or Uda) comes by, when he will probably remember to hand it over to them for onward delivery.

Roleplaying Notes: Leofric is generally distracted and disinterested - lean back, gaze into the middle distance, talk dismissively about most peoples’ concerns and travails... unless the character he is talking to is high enough status to help his social climbing, in which case he is attentive, engaged, friendly. Suggested catchphrase: “That does sound tedious.”

Gilbert Tacet

Gilbert, resident in the covenant of Burnham, is the tribunal's only Gifted Mercere. The illegitimate son of a knight from Anjou, his magics focus on surreptitiously intercepting information, surreptitiously acquiring items, surreptitiously killing people... in short he might possibly be Europe's most formidable magical spy/assassin. He is loyal to the Arch-Mage Stephanus for several reasons: he actually likes Stephanus; he feels valued that his advice is heeded by the Arch-Mage; he enjoys the occasional challenge of a key mission, while generally being left alone to study while most of the espionage is undertaken by mundane agents; and vitally, Burnham has arranged for a Longevity Ritual for his wife, to whom he is devoted.

Much of Gilbert's time is spent training his apprentice, who is also his daughter – the only child born before Longevity Rituals rendered Gilbert infertile, and now a stone-hearted young woman whom, he hopes, will one day eclipse even his abilities in the arts of subterfuge and murder.

Roleplaying Notes: Gilbert is constantly alert. Sit straight. Keep eye contact. Say little, but nod. Suggested catchphrase: "Perhaps."

Hawys the Widow

Modestly dressed, with a red hood and pilgrim badges adorning her satchel, Hawys travels from spring to autumn, delivering messages to the Order's magi. She is a dutiful if somewhat disinterested redcap, with predictable routes.

After wintering in Burnham (which trains her in winter, and funds her journeys through the year), she leaves at the start of spring, travels to Schola Pythagoranis, and then up to the Mercer House in York; then she heads via Murkfell to Sanguis Vento, usually continuing up to the lowlands to visit a couple of Loch Leglean covenants (e.g. Horsingas) before swinging south again and returning to York. Then she heads down through Wales, receiving the customary "go away!" from Cad Gadu and a warmer welcome at Blackthorn, before heading to Rossan, Tintagel, and then the house of Leofric the Mercer and The Chines, before swinging north to Dens and returning via Schola Pythagoranis again to Burnham. Her route is not rapid, as she usually travels with groups of travellers (often pilgrims) for both mutual protection and good company, and if her circuit is delayed she may cut out the route down to Rossan and Tintagel or skip her diversion into Scotland, but in general the magi of Stonehenge can rely on a fairly regular arrival of a redcap: she will be in Burnham all winter, Schola Pythagoranis and the York Mercer House see her twice each year, and the other known covenants and a few solitary magi each usually see her once at a predictable time each year.

Her piety is genuine, as is her widowhood, and she is always happy to pause at shrines

when she can, often to pray for the soul of her dead husband. The pilgrim badges on her satchel attest to visits to Walsingham, York, and numerous lesser pilgrim destinations. However, if she thinks that she is carrying anything magical she will prudently avoid approaching shrines or other areas of very high Divine aura.

She also actively avoids picking up gossip, or getting involved in mages' schemes. She tells people bluntly that she is just a messenger, and that the less she knows and the less she is involved in anything, the less risk this puts her at and the more reliably their messages will be delivered. This is sensible, but it is also borne of her dislike of high-handed interference in peoples' lives, a sentiment which may lead to her being a bit remiss in passing on information to the York Mercer House: if a mage wants to live a solitary life and not have their name and location noted in York, then she is happy to respect that, and there are a couple of magi who she knows the whereabouts of who are otherwise forgotten by the Order.

Roleplaying Notes: Hawys is quietly reserved. Call most people Sir or Madam. Deferentially avoid direct eye contact. Get twitchy and ask them to stop if they start confiding in her or asking for rumours. Suggested catchphrase: "I'm just a messenger."

Brianus the Swift

Brianus, clad in his rune-embroidered cloak, will carry your message through any weather, undeterred by cold or rain or snow. He is, he will tell you, the most dedicated and reliable redcap in the Tribunal. Indeed he is, he will also tell you, most certainly the best redcap in the Tribunal – if not in the Order. If your messages are important, why would you not entrust your messages to the finest courier that you will ever meet? For a generous fee, he will carry your letters or packages anywhere in the Stonehenge or Loch Leglean Tribunals, or, for an even more generous fee, to any adjacent Tribunal.

Of course there is a price. Brianus is not cheap. He stays in the best inns, ordering the finest wines, tipping minstrels generously – but why not? He is the best, and deserves the best!

In fact, Brianus is not especially good. He is, as a messenger, pretty average – remarkable only for the size of his ego. The only things that really make him better than any common courier are his cloak (which keeps him dry), his pendant (which keeps him warm), and a pair of enchanted enchanted boots (which let him cover twice the normal distance for a messenger on foot each day).

In truth, behind the bravado and pompous boasting, Brianus does actually have a pretty compelling proposition for many magi. He will deliver one message at a time, making it his sole priority and not relegating it to a routine delivery on a pre-defined route. This makes his delivery times shorter than Hawys's, certainly.

Unfortunately, there is a catch – which he will not tell you about. And there is a reason why he doesn't mention that his boots help him move faster.

In almost every instance, he will not take your messages direct to their destination. Instead, he will take them via his home – a beautiful cottage in a pretty woodland on the borders between the Stonehenge and Loch Leglean Tribunals. And there – unless the messages seem warded or enchanted - his three wives will have a look at the messages. (Literally, they will just have a look at them; they won't break the seals or unfurl them – they don't need to. They can absorb secrets just by looking at the letters... or at books, or at people.) And after perusing the messages, his grateful wives will serve Brianus a wonderful feast, share the finest wines with him, and bed him between the softest sheets, until after a few days of decadence they send him on his way to deliver his messages and find more secrets for them.

His “wives”, whom he never actually married, are, of course, minor demons. They have led him to believe that they are faeries; and, happy to be fooled by beauties who promise such indulgence and luxury, and who flatter him so convincingly, he has let himself believe that. His beautiful house is a hovel, the fine wines are vile, the “wives” are hideous... as he approaches, he falls under an infernal spell, which deludes him.

In this way infernal forces have corrupted the proud redcap into betraying the Order. Blackthorn, The Chines, Sanguis Vento and Schola Pythagoranis have all trusted him, and the demons have read many an intriguing letter from them. And (through his pride, lies, gluttony and lechery) Brianus has damned himself. Beyond this, the question remains, are the demons acting independently, or on behalf of a human diabolist?

Roleplaying Notes: Brianus is the best. Let everyone know it. Sit back, gesture expressively, grin when talking about yourself. Make it clear that you and the magi are superior to mere mortals. Suggested catchphrase: “Of course, the likes of you and I are above such worries....”

Uda of Bruges

While most redcaps travel by road, Uda views the sea as her highway. Her mother was a Gifted Mercere, and while neither she nor her brother Henryk inherited her talents, Uda is happy to serve the Order, especially as it allows her to spend so much time at sea – which she loves.

Her ship, Brendan's Wish, was built in Ireland, but carries numerous subtle improvements of a magical nature, and is now technically the property of House Mercere (Harco). Rumour is that it is unsinkable. Certainly it uncannily benefits, at all times, from favourable winds, among other advantages. Uda is allowed to captain it, so long as its voyages serve the Order.

Uda travels from the east coast of Scotland and the ports of Flanders, down around the east and south English coasts, to Normandy and Brittany, and then as far around as Wales and across to south and west Ireland, sometimes venturing as far north as the Isle of Mann. In this way she visits covenants close to the coasts of five different Tribunals. She has no specific route, but she may drop in to any Covenants and their holdings within a day's walk of any safe harbour. There she will ask if there are any cargoes or messages which she can usefully take on behalf of any magi. She is not entirely even in her treatment of magi, more frequently visiting those whom she likes (and considers honest and benevolent), and outright avoiding places which she considers freakish or obnoxious.

She enthusiastically visits The Chines and will happily do whatever she can to help them in their troubles (she admires their sincerity and hard work, and they are by far her favourite magi in the Stonehenge Tribunal). She dutifully visits the York Mercer House (though she finds her brother embarrassingly sleazy) and Leofric the Mercer (though she dislikes his self-centred greed), and Burnham (although she just can't bring herself to trust somewhere so unremittingly nice, nor any Tytalus Arch-Mage). But even though both are right on the coast she never visits either Tintagel (she did once, and found it just too weird) nor Sanguis Vento (whom she regards as deeply unpleasant human beings – plus, they scare her.)

Between stops at covenants, she will also visit most of the major ports around the Irish Sea and North Sea - Bruges, Dublin, Hunefloth (Honfleur), London, Southampton, Weiseforthe (Wexford), etc. - and she often provides transport to agents and companions from covenants who wish to trade at these towns.

Her route also frequently takes in other covenants and Mercer Houses in neighbouring tribunals, and so she is frequently the courier for communications between Stonehenge and neighbouring Tribunals. (E.g., Cliffheart, Leth Moga, The Peruchia of Nerius, Qui Sonant; Fudarus if she asked told to, and Confluensis and Florum more enthusiastically; and Waddenzee).

For any one-off cargo or message that she takes, she requires sufficient payment (in cash) to maintain her ship and crew, but she makes no effort to make a profit. Those who wish to use her services regularly or who want her to travel beyond her usual waters will be asked to either make a donation of vis or, even better, to provide an enchanted device to aid her voyages.

Roleplaying Notes: Uda would rather be back on her ship. Feet set apart (as if on deck of a ship), a slight frown, an urgency in her speech. Suggested catchphrase: “All these buildings!”

The York Mercer House

The “Mercere House” or “Mercer House” outside the walls of York is a run-down lodging house run by the non-magical Mercere member, “Henryk of York”. It has rooms available for rent and provides food to order for mundane travellers: York is England’s second largest city, with a population of over 12,000, it is a trade centre and also the seat of an Arch Bishop – and as such it is moving away from being a ramshackle settlement and towards being a “proper” city, with a need for commercial services such as lodgings and food for visitors.

But the House also provides a range of other services specifically for members of the Order and their servants.

Most obviously, it is a **central depot of sorts for the redcaps**. If Hawys is given a letter to be delivered outside of her usual route she could leave it here to be picked up by another redcap (such as Uda) who can then carry it onwards. Likewise, if a redcap from the south or west has a message for a Stonehenge covenant, then rather than try to find the specific destination they can drop a message off here for Hawys to take onwards. However, as neither Uda nor Hawys have any great respect for Henryk, they are generally happier to meet in person to exchange messages (e.g. at Burnham on the first day of spring), so that the Mercer House rarely holds many letters.

It might also be expected to be a **central repository of information** about the magi of the Tribunal. Magi from more formal Tribunals, expecting bound tomes of details of residence, Tribunal rulings, vis rights, etc., will be disappointed, however. Henryk has little interest in administrative bureaucracy, Hawys is very respectful of the privacy of magi and dislikes the idea of reporting on them, and Uda has little interest in anything beyond her ship, so nobody actually has any interest in maintaining detailed records. But stashed in a chest Henryk will have a few cursory notes that he has kept, and any information which specific covenants have lodged here, which he will share on request to any redcap, Quaesitor or anyone else who seems to have a legitimate reason to ask. In practice, there is highly variable information about the Tribunal’s covenants available here.

- Blackthorn have lodged with the Mercer House a formally prepared and bound booklet explaining how to reach their covenant, how to avoid getting attacked by the locals, the names and Hermetic pedigrees of all its members, and plenty of tedious dates and facts about their past glories and distant history (at least, their edited version of their history), etc. - because this is “the proper thing to do” and they want to appear to be playing by the rules.
- Burnham, in a spirit of open friendship, has provided a large stack of parchments which are akin to a travel guide. As well as specifying Burnham’s location and the names of their members, and cheerily inviting all members of the Order to visit and refresh themselves as they wish, there are also lengthy discussions about how and where a magus could travel in the east and south-east of England, with

reviews of inn and lodgings, notes on what mundane scholars are receptive to or suspicious of those with magical powers, on what estates in the south of England produce palatable wine, what London merchants might give good deals on laboratory components, and so on. Any mage might find this useful, but of course this is also an excellent way of directing magi towards places and people who are observed by or reporting to Burnham's spy network.

- Cad Gadu, despite being a domus magna, is not mentioned in Henryk's notes.
- The Chines provides, each few years, an up-to-date list of its members, and directs enquiries to Carisbrooke Castle on the Isle of Wight. (The castle isn't their covenant, but they get on very well with the mundane rulers and are cautious enough to want their allies to vet strangers and visitors.)
- Dawns End is referred to in a couple of very old notes (is it somewhere near Leicester?), but there is nothing from the last decade or two.
- Dens is mentioned in only one letter. An idealistic Quaesitor, returning in disgust to Normandy, filed an outraged note to the effect that when he had travelled to Dens and demanded that they state who their members were so that the information could be logged by the Order, the Bjornaer magi laughed at him, stating "a wolf pack feels no need to catalogue its members; that is the obsession of small minded lawyers. True magi are more akin to wolves than lawyers." The note says that the exchange took place in a camp in the forest near Hereford.
- Murkfell's founders, when they first settle on their hill, send a single note stating that they have set up a covenant, listing their names and stating that it is "near" a couple of villages that are a dozen miles away, to minimise the chance of anyone coming snooping.
- Sanguis Vento have provided a broad parchment inviting all "martial magi of courage and power, who wish to join us in our campaigns" to visit them, with instructions on how to beg entry to the covenant. But they have provided no other information – not even the names of their magi.
- Schola Pythagoranis has provided a terse list of its members, simply specifying that they live "in Oxford". More substantial is the sheaf of parchments which they have lodged here detailing many, many books (generally mundane books) which they are keen to borrow, in case anyone happens to have spare copies.
- Rossan sends (via Uda) a bewildering series of hastily scribbled notes. Stuscis simply scrawls off a note every time someone arrives or leaves, saying this person has now "joined" or "left"; as far as he is concerned, anyone staying there is a "member" – or at least, that is what he tells the redcaps, so that he can't be seen to be hiding anything. Unfortunately this approach leads to more confusion than clarity, as he frequently claims as members who are actually visitors from other covenants, often miss-spells mages' names, and scribbles in such a slap-dash way that the names are not always legible.
- Tintagel has provided a beautifully illuminated book which seems to detail the adventures of a talking swan. They said that the book is about their covenant, but it seems just to be a story book which tells a different story every time it is opened. Henryk usually has this book to hand (often with a mug of wine perched on its exquisitely tooled cover) because he likes to read the stories to his younger

children at bed-time.

And lastly, the Mercer House also provides **free accommodation** for magi and their retainers. In practice few take advantage of this, as most of the magi keep to themselves and see little reason to visit York. But Hawys the Widow stays twice a year, and several mundane envoys of Burnham (its diplomats – not its more surreptitious spies, who stay away) take advantage of the free lodgings. Food and board are not charged for to anyone associated with a covenant, but Henryk does often appeal for donations. (House Mercere pays a stipend to cover the House's upkeep – but Henryk is always happy to have a bit more silver to fund his indulgences.)

The Mercer House and Canon: Mercere Portals and Vis Trading

Some of the *Ars Magica* 5th edition supplements offer a more bureaucratic view of the Order, with magic portals for long-distance travel and established mechanisms for trading vis. If you want to use these ideas in your saga, then canonically the only portal in the British Isles is in the York Mercer House, and for simplicity you can also assume that Henryk runs the vis trading for House Mercere in the Tribunal. In this case you will want to modify the Mercer House a little, so that although it may appear to be a bit run-down and grotty, behind that facade there should be doors and vaults and rooms lined with solid stone slabs and protective wards of massive power etc., etc., etc. to protect access to the portal and to any vis supplies held here.