

Top U.K. Druid charged with money fraud

by [Al Webb](#)

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LONDON (RNS) One of the prominent figures in the revived ancient priesthood of Druidism in Britain has been charged with defrauding the government of 40,000 pounds (about \$25,000) in welfare payments over the past eight years.

Druid Terry Dobney, the self-styled "Keeper of the Stones" at the nation's ages-old monument at Stonehenge, is best known for his walks through the countryside with a staff while wearing a tweed cap.

The 62-year-old arch-Druid told Salisbury Crown Court that the money belonged to his mother and that he planned to use it to buy a new thatched roof for his home.

Prosecutors, however, claim that Dobney routinely falsely signed documents to accumulate illegal welfare payments. Fraud has sharply increased in recent years in Britain's extensive welfare system.

In the nebulous assembly of Druids in Britain, Dobney is one of the more famous, particularly in televised Druidic activities around Stonehenge and the summer solstice celebrations a few miles north at Avebury.

Druids formed a priestly class in ancient Britain, Ireland and other

Celtic parts of Europe during the Iron Age. But they kept few, if any, written accounts, and present-day Druidic practices are largely based on legends recounted by medieval writers.