after:hours Centre for Languages, Culture and Communication

**Course Descriptor**

**Course Title:** Spellbound: A History of Magic and the Occult

**Type of Course:** Adult Education

**Credit:** Not credit bearing

**Weekly Session Titles and Descriptions**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Week | Session Title/Description |  |
| 1 | *Religion’s weird sister:*defining magic  |  |
| 2 | *Voodoo dolls and cursing slates*: effigy magic since ancient times  |  |
| 3 | *Stone circles and healing wells*: magic and the landscape  |  |
| 4 | *Celtic folklore*: fairies and curses  |  |
| 5 | *A ‘witch craze’?* Witchcraft in Europe, c. 1400-1750  |  |
| 6 | *Obeah and Voodoo in the Caribbean*  |  |
| 7 | *The cunning-craft*  |  |
| 8 | *Shamans and shape-shifters* |  |
| 9 | *Grimoires*: the history of magic books  |  |
| 10 | *Mesmerism, spiritualism, and the Victorian occult revival*  |  |
| 11 | *Devils and demons: jinn, exorcism and deliverance* |  |
| 12 | *Alas poor ghost: restless spirits and second lives* |  |
| 13 | *Cursed Britain: evil magic after the witch trials* |  |
| 14 | *Making a fortune: fortune-telling and tarot cards* |  |
| 15 | *Military magic: the supernatural during war and conflict* |  |
| 16 | *Curse of a continent? Witchcraft in modern Africa* |  |
| 17 | *From Brothers Grimm to Harry Potter: the power of the magical imagination* |  |
| 18 | *Traditional Chinese folk magic* |  |
| 19 | *New witchcrafts for a New Age?  Baphomet and Satanism, wicca and hedge witchcraft* |  |
| 20 | *A global magical revival? Occultism today* |  |

|  |
| --- |
| Course OverviewThe celebrated necromancer and court magician to Queen Elizabeth I, John Dee, was said to have owned a ‘black mirror’ that enabled him to see into the future, as well as a magic crystal, inhabited by a daemon, that could cure kidney disease. Of course, that was in the sixteenth century and in our society we no longer believe in such things. Except that even today many people have a superstitious terror of breaking mirrors, and shops selling supposedly healing crystals can be found in many of Britain towns and cities.On this course we will explore the history and practise of magic, spell-craft and the occult from ancient times to the present day. We will learn about witches, fairies, shamans and fortune-tellers, as well as beliefs in curses and ghosts, protective talisman and superstitious fears associated with the occult. Each week we will examine a key theme in the history of magic, assess its place in different cultures around the world, and consider how the theme has changed over time. We will also look at the place of magic and the occult in art, literature and popular culture, from the fairy tales of the Grimm Brothers, to the wizardry of Harry Potter.Using the methods of historical study, folklore, anthropology and psychology, we will discover why magic has haunted the human imagination so persistently, and how it continues to resonate even today.As part of the course, you will be encouraged to draw on your own experiences in relating to the material taught in the course, through discussions and open questions, such as areas where we might be superstitious, have talismanic objects we turn to, or even have more definite beliefs or disbeliefs in supposed praeternatural forces.Required Previous Experience (if any)No previous experience of philosophy is necessary, but you should have some background in psychotherapy.Required Reading Material or Special Equipment Needed (if any)There is no compulsory reading for this course, but you might find the following useful:* Thomas Waters, Cursed Britain: A History of Witchcraft and Black Magic in Modern Times (Yale University Press, 2019)

Learning OutcomesAt the end of this course you should be able to* Outline some of the key manifestations of witchcraft, magic and the occult both as an historical and a contemporary phenomenon
* Recognise and use some of the key methodological tools used by academics for researching social phenomena like witchcraft, magic and the occult
* Place the phenomena of witchcraft, magic and the occult in relation to broader social, cultural and political contexts.

Possible Further StudyFurther courses on the after:hours programme might be useful to you.Additional informationThis course descriptor may be subject to change during the delivery of the course, depending on the specific direction and nature of the learner cohort, and is intended to be responsive to the group dynamics as they emerge during the delivery of the course. |