



SHAKESPEARE 400

THE ELIZABETHAN IN QUESTION **DOCTOR JOHN DEE** THURSDAY 21 JULY

Elizabethans' fascination with the occult fed into the pact with the devil of Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, the fairies in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the ghost in *Hamlet* and the ghosts and witches in *Macbeth*. It is almost certain that Shakespeare modelled the character of Prospero in *The Tempest* on the career of Dr. John Dee (1527-1609), the Elizabethan magus. Visionary of the British Empire, Dee coined the word 'Britannia', was the first to apply Euclidian geometry to navigation and make the appropriate instruments, trained the first great navigators, developed the maps and charted the Northeast and Northwest Passages. An advocate of British Imperial expansion, he was also the trusted philosopher and astrologer to the Queen who would visit him on her horse. He amassed the largest private library in England, one of the finest in Europe, believed in angels, and passionately researched the unities underlying all mankind, and may have founded the Rosicrucian order as a Protestant response to the Jesuits. He believed that mathematics (which he understood mystically) was central to the progress of human learning. In 1582 he made his first contact with the spirit world via a crystal ball, and used the Enochian script to make contact with the angel Uriel. He found the elixir of life in the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey, was employed by Emperor Rudolf of Prague to investigate the Philosophers' Stone, was fired, and turned out on the streets of Prague as a fortune-teller. Back in England he had to petition James I for protection against accusations that he was a wizard. We explore the parallel worlds of magic, science and religion in Shakespeare's England.