

DOREEN'S GUIDE
TO THE COVENS

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A 'Which?' on the witches

SHAKESPEARE is much to blame for giving us a picture of witches as secret, black and midnight hags, hovering through the fog and filthy air.

Mrs Doreen Valiente, right, of Sillwood Place, Brighton, who calls herself a practising witch, is not like that at all. In fact she would have to disguise herself heavily before she could play in the witches' scenes in Macbeth.

An elder in the witchcraft movement, she is the author of what promises to be a startling book, *An ABC of Witchcraft Past and Present*, which Robert Hale and Company are to publish in June. It will be an impressive, illustrated volume of 416 pages, at £3.50.

In their preliminary notice, the publishers say: "This is the only book of its kind written by a practising witch. It is intended as not merely a history, but a guide to the many strange byways of a vast and fascinating subject."

Mrs Valiente would not thank anyone calling her a "white witch"; she prefers to be just a witch. Any division of witches into white and evil categories is not justified by history, she says.

AWARENESS

Her book will show that witchcraft is as old as the human race and its devotees as worshippers in the oldest religion of the world. They were pagan nature worshippers long before the Druids.

"Witchcraft is a philosophy and a way of life," she told a reporter. "It brings about a better enjoyment of living, a greater awareness of the beauties of the world."

Interest in witchcraft and in the occult generally, she says, has grown tremendously in recent years. This coincides with the coming in of the Aquarian Age when great changes are taking place.

Sussex, like other parts of the country, has several covens of witches who hold regular sabbats, with all the traditional ritual of dances, spells and sacrifices.

But, according to Mrs Valiente, they are merely play-acting and are regarded by real witches as something of a joke.

She firmly dissociates the genuine witches from the Satanists who, in Sussex and elsewhere, have often desecrated churches to celebrate the black mass.

"Genuine witches," she said, "see no necessity to dress up in the cast-off rags of Christianity. Witchcraft, as



a religion, is far, far older than Christianity."

Born in London, Mrs Valiente comes of a family long associated with the New Forest, which she considers a mystic area.

With her Spanish-born husband, she has lived in Brighton since 1956, and her

home contains many of the objects and charms historically associated with witchcraft and magic.

Apart from being an authority on witchcraft, she is a painter and a poet. Some of her poems have been read at the London meetings of the Poetry Society.