ABSTRACT: It once seemed axiomatic that the Enlightenment was characterised by its decisive rejection of belief in magical phenomena. But the need for a reconsideration has been suggested by recent books like Paul Kléber Monod’s Solomon’s Secret Arts (2103) -- which have illustrated how common occult pursuits remained throughout the eighteenth century -- and it is this that my talk will offer. In fact, though many contemporaries seem simply to have ignored such beliefs, certain figures were articulate in their rejection of magic, including Deists like John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, medical men like Sir Hans Sloane and Richard Mead, and radical clerics like Arthur Ashley Sykes and Conyers Middleton. It will be suggested that it was in the fashionable circles inhabited by such figures that scepticism about magic was most likely to be expressed, and that this was influential in proportion to their cosmopolitan status. At the same time, however, our understanding of the Enlightenment is enhanced by seeing how such attitudes coexisted with quite contradictory ones.

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