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William Winterstone is a witchcraft expert. He is holding a pipe used in witchcraft rituals.

Halloween myths are called unfair

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BURLINGTON — As night falls on today, Americans again will revel in Halloween fantasies of ghosts and evil spirits — and, according to a Chapel Hill astrologer, perpetuate unfair myths about witches and witchcraft.

William Winterstone, a witchcraft expert who works in Durham with the American Indian Medicine Society, says most people believe mistakenly that witchcraft involves devil worship, sacrifices and magical spells. Only a few "witches" indulge in such activities, he says.

"There was a time supposedly when the witches had meetings with spirits, sexual groupings beneath the moon, black masses — all of these things are Satanic rituals associated with witchcraft," Winterstone said.

"What they're doing is exploiting that media image. Those people . . . are looking for thrills."

Images and symbols typically associated with witchcraft and seen in books, films and paintings "were probably figments of some writer's brain," Winterstone said. "I've never seen a wood imp or a centaur. Demons and gargoyles probably never existed either."

True practitioners of witchcraft are looking for answers to the problems of the world, Winterstone said.

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"The large number of true practicing witches . . . are trying to find some way to respond to their environment . . . to depend upon nature, to respect nature, to get in touch with nature — all things of the Earth — herbs, animals, winds, seasons," he said.

"We need to experience the power of these things. The Earth is a great teacher. We need to listen to the Earth more than we do."

Winterstone described orthodox witchcraft as a study of the elements and a method through which a person can obtain self-discovery and balance in his or her life.

"It's a technique for getting more in touch with yourself," he said. "It's a way of experiencing the mysterious spiritual side of life directly, not through the abstractions (of Christianity)."