

THE SHAKESPEARE CLUB OF STRATFORD UPON AVON

The 855th meeting of the Shakespeare Club took place in the Wolfson Hall at the Shakespeare Centre on 14 September 2010. The Chairman for the first meeting of the 2010/11 season, Dr James Stredder, welcomed Dr Abigail Rokison from Homerton College, University of Cambridge. Dr Rokison's talk was entitled: 'Shakespearean Verse-speaking', based on her recently published book with the same title. Dr Rokison brought a dual perspective to the subject as she is both a professional actor and an academic. She began with a review of recent publications on verse-speaking, including those by Peter Hall, John Barton, Patsy Rodenburg, Cicely Berry, Declan Donnellan, that argued that actors could and should identify clues to the interpretation and delivery of Shakespeare's words in his verse. This came at a time of increasing emphasis on verse-speaking away from stage spectacle, partly influenced by Shakespeare's Globe and the search for authenticity in Shakespeare production. Dr Rokison challenged the idea that verse-speaking could be reduced to a set of rules, for example that the First Folio was the only authentic text for actors, and illustrated the effect of two schools of thought, using the guidance of line endings and short verse lines, on the speaking and interpretation of a number of speeches. She traced the genealogy of these ideas back to William Poel, an early 20th century proponent of Elizabethan staging and speaking, through two lines: via George Rylands and the Marlowe Society that influenced the Cambridge-educated directors, Hall and Barton, and from Elsie Fogerty at the Central School of Speech and Drama to Berry and Rodenburg. Dr Rokison concluded that there was a need for more dialogue between actors and academics: that actors should be more aware of the historical context in which Shakespeare's texts were performed and printed; that academics should be alert to the practical requirements of the theatre.

After questions and a vote of thanks, the meeting ended at 9.15pm