

The Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon

The 889th meeting of the Shakespeare Club and its 2014/5 Presidential evening took place at Mason Croft on Tuesday 11 November 2014. The award-winning actor Jeremy Irons, this year's President, was introduced by Roger Pringle and gave a lively and entertaining talk titled *An Actor's Life for Me*, in which he traced the process of becoming an actor, from his schooldays at Sherborne to his season at the RSC in 1986.

At school, Mr Irons claimed, he was attracted to acting to get away from the type of people with whom he was educated. On the strength of having played Mr Puff in Sheridan's *The Critic* he left school with the intention of becoming a West End actor and trained at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School where he was a contemporary of Simon Cadell and Tim Pigott-Smith. After many rejections he achieved his ambition, being cast as Judas in the long-running musical *Godspell* which started his stage career. In 1981 he made his name in the television series of *Brideshead Revisited* as Charles Ryder, a role for which, he said, his education to be a 'closed Englishman' perfectly prepared him.

Throughout the talk Mr Irons shared his thoughts and experience on actors and acting. His approach to a role was instinctive, his aim to leave channels open for the text. He likened the actor to a trumpet: the writer blew in at one end and actor, without getting in the way, let the air come out in the character at the other. He tried not to be an 'actor actor'. His anecdotes about the challenges of long runs and the methods he used keep himself and fellow actors fresh were as entertaining as they were dangerous.

Mr Irons had time to only touch on his Shakespearean work though he spoke at some length about Richard II which he saw as Shakespeare's requiem for a time which Bolingbroke had destroyed. He left the audience hoping for second visit to talk about his later Shakespearean roles such as Henry IV in the BBC's *Hollow Crown*.

After questions from the audience, a DVD of *The Hollow Crown* was raffled and signed by the President. The meeting finished at 9.15pm when members adjourned for refreshments.