

The Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon

The 883rd meeting of the Shakespeare Club took place at Mason Croft on Tuesday 13 January 2014. The meeting was chaired by Mr John Cunnington who introduced the speaker for the evening, Ms Erica Whyman, since January 2013 Deputy Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company. Her subject was 'Shakespeare and his Spirit of Radical Mischief'.

Ms Whyman described her responsibilities as new writing and the development of The Other Place as well as strategic planning with the Artistic Director, Greg Doran, and outlined her background before the RSC. She had a degree in French and Philosophy, the latter being central to her work in the theatre as, she said, theatre asked the most difficult questions of life. She had worked at the Southwark Theatre, the Gate (which invented the current interest in translated plays) and the Northern Stage at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, which had worked with the RSC for 37 years.

The Northern Stage Studio, with its young audiences and repertoire of modern classics with a political conscience, informed her thinking about The Other Place. Ms Whyman asked what kind of theatre would Shakespeare make if he were here now, claiming him as a new writer in his time and a radical theatre-maker. She outlined the history of TOP and the contribution of Buzz Goodbody who founded it forty years ago in 1974. In 2014 the RSC would construct a small theatre within the Courtyard and planned to invite six playwrights to respond to *The Roaring Girl*, exploring women and behaviour, of which four would be selected for staging in June/July.

At the same time there would be no more Shakespeare in the Swan, though the repertoire of plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries and new writing reflecting back on Shakespeare would provide a context for work in the main house. The RSC was aiming not to repeat plays within six years.

Ms Whyman then shared some secrets about the forthcoming season: *The Witch of Edmondton* would be the fourth roaring girl play; the RSC would mark the beginning of the Great War in 2014 with a newly commissioned play about the Warwickshire Regiment in Belgium which she would direct, including a performance on Christmas Eve 2014, as well as *Love's Labour's Lost* set before World War I and *Much Ado* (which Greg Doran claimed as the lost *Love Labour's Won*) set postwar in the 1920s.

Looking forward she reflected on the importance of 2016 not just the anniversary of Shakespeare's death but also of Cervantes' and the publication of Ben Jonson's works in Folio. She ended by referring to a new RSC newspaper titled *Radical Mischief* which would report on these new initiatives.

Following questions, and the drawing of a raffle, the meeting closed at 9.15 pm.