

## The Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon

**The 888<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Shakespeare Club took place at Mason Croft on Tuesday 7 October 2014.** Mr Nicholas Fogg, chaired by Sylvia Morris, took as his subject "Get the glass eyes": A view of Shakespeare and Politics.

Mr Fogg warned that to understand the politics of Shakespeare's time it was necessary to put aside the modern mindset which instinctively rejected such concepts as the divine right of kings and a religious basis for political thought and practice. He began with the influence of Machiavelli on drama of the time, *Richard III*, *Macbeth* and Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*. Looking at the political life of Stratford and of England, he pointed out that both were oligarchies confined to a small close-knit number of individuals with many internal rivalries. Political clashes tended to be personal and dynastic rather than strategic.

Shakespeare's history plays addressed dynastic issues but were also rallying call for contemporary political issues, for example national unity and the importance of a stable monarchy. Mr Fogg discussed the issues raised in *Henry V* (the moral responsibility for war); *King John* (the influence of the Papacy) and particularly *Richard II*, a play which focussed on political change at a time when the succession to the throne was a live issue. Mr Fogg pointed out that Shakespeare was exceptional among contemporary dramatists not to have a brush with the authorities which, he conjectured, was partly owing to the Lord Chamberlain's patronage of his company but also because he set his plays in different places and times. The exception was *Sir Thomas More*, where a scene addressing the plight of immigrants in London and the effect of mob rule was cut by the censor.

Mr Fogg told how Shakespeare's company received a patent from King James in 1603 and became the King's Men and how Shakespeare and his fellow actors became Grooms of the Chamber with a role at court. Mr Fogg concluded that Shakespeare was a poet who was intensely engaged in contemporary events

After questions from the audience, the meeting finished at 9.15pm and members adjourned for refreshments.