

Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon

The 895th meeting of the Shakespeare Club took place at Mason Croft on Tuesday 8 September 2016. Dr Susan Brock took the chair and introduced the first speaker of the 2015/16 season, Professor David Roberts, Executive Dean of Arts, Design and Media at Birmingham City University, who spoke on 'Shakespeare and Jewellery'.

Professor Roberts began his talk with images of three Elizabethan men wearing earrings, including the Chandos portrait of Shakespeare. He followed the thesis of Tanya Cooper that earring wearers at that time were mainly courtiers and men of creative ambition, but he quoted an opposite view from Phillip Stubbes who, in his *Anatomie of Abuses* of 1583, referred to such men as 'another sort of dissolute minions', evoking tacitly the homoerotic charge of the wearing of jewellery. Professor Roberts moved on from the materiality of jewellery to consider Shakespeare's metaphorical use of the word jewel to refer to woman such as Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*, Diana in *All's Well* and Shylock's Jessica, though his best known usage referred not to a woman but a country in *Richard II*: 'this little world/ This precious stone set in the silver sea..'. Returning to the current interest in material objects as representations of a time, place or idea, for example in Neil MacGregor's *History of the World in 100 Objects* or Jonathan Bate and Dora Thornton's *Shakespeare Staging the World*, the speaker pointed out that Shakespeare seemed to have known surprisingly little of the craft of the jeweller though he lived for a time in Silver St. The metaphorical and emotional life of things held more interest for him.

Describing the passing of fake jewels in the early seventeenth century, specifically by Thomas Sympson of the Goldsmith's Company, Professor Roberts speculated on the fact that jewels as guarantors were as unreliable as actors, fakes indistinguishable from the real thing. Listing the number of references to jewel and jewels in Shakespeare's works, relating their loss or absence to Keats's idea of negative capability and placing Shakespeare on the spectrum of the fashion shift from male to female wearers, Professor Roberts covered the subject, Shakespeare and Jewellery, from every aspect with wit and learning.