

The Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon

The 912th meeting of the Shakespeare Club took place on Tuesday 14 November 2017. Michael Wood, the distinguished broadcaster and author and the Club's President for 2017/8, delivered his Presidential Address, *Shakespeare's Memory*. Vice-President Roger Pringle took the chair.

Mr Wood's thesis was that our memories were shaped by our parents and grandparents and was based on the advice of historian Joel Hurstfield that, to write a biography, one had to look at the 20 years which preceded the birth of the subject. This was particularly helpful in understanding Shakespeare who was born on the cusp of change, as he put it, 'between the no longer and the not yet.' The memories of his reading as a schoolboy and later is evidenced in the text of his plays but those texts also record his family and neighbours and the rural life of Warwickshire.

The Shakespeare clan came from north of Stratford, Rowington, Baddesley Clinton, Aston Cantlow and Wroxall, so Mr Wood started his story of Shakespeare's memory in Snitterfield where the connection was made between to Shakespeares and the Ardens, both '100 acre farmers', modest husbandmen. Drawing on the will of Shakespeare's maternal grandfather Robert Arden of Snitterfield who died in 1556, he recreated the world of Shakespeare's family, their material life and their religious faith. The move to Stratford by Shakespeare's parents Mary and John elevated the family to the middle classes for gloving was a luxury trade, and their sons were hatters, haberdashers and theatre people.

Mr Wood reviewed the ups and downs of John Shakespeare's career in the wooltrade which Shakespeare remembered in detail in the sheep-shearing festival in *The Winter's Tale* and showed how his work was coloured by the memories and imaginative sympathies formed in old pre-Reformation England. Like the connections made throughout his paper, Mr Wood's final image brought Shakespeare to life – a small boy at his father's side watching and listening to all that went on about him, unconsciously taking in 'how people are with people'.

After a vote of thanks proposed by Susan Brock, the meeting attended by over 100 members of the Club and visitors, ended at 9pm.