

Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon

The **906th meeting of the Shakespeare Club took place on Tuesday 10 January 2017 at Mason Croft**. Sir Richard Eyre, President of the Club for 2016/7, spoke about *Shakespeareana*, chaired by Vice President Roger Pringle. His title might have raised visions of tea towels and toby jugs, he explained, but he wanted to focus on Shakespeare's ability to speak across centuries to all classes and creeds. Drawing on his own experience of touring and directing Shakespeare's plays especially in Eastern Europe, he asked how Shakespeare had become the national playwright for many countries and why his plays lived in many languages. It was neither the poet's life nor his language that carried across cultures. It was his acute awareness of the 'theatreness' of theatre informed by his personal contact with its practicalities. Shakespeare brought to bear his experience as playwright, producer and actor. Personation, the creation of an identity and personality for each character, had effectively been invented by Shakespeare. Even small parts like the Sergeant in *Macbeth* were created as individuals not just conveyors of information.

Sir Richard argued that Shakespeare's lack of attachment to organised religion, his representation of secular politics and even his sexual ambiguity gave his work commonality with every world culture. As a writer he was obsessed by humanness and the redeeming nature of love of all sorts, except the love of God. Quoting Robert Frost that poetry is what is lost in translation, Sir Richard said in Shakespeare's case it was language yet his plays survived that loss. The key to his universality was a profound vision of the ambiguity of human affairs and his ability to invent characters impartially, uncoloured by his own beliefs. Returning to his title he declared that the best films of Shakespeare's plays were not Shakespeare but Shakespearean. In conclusion he claimed Shakespeare's genius was comparable to an Einstein or a Galileo in that he changed the way we look at the world.

Sir Richard had described Shakespeare's history plays as showing all society in microcosm. His talk gave us all of Shakespeare in the same vein and was received with enthusiasm by a large audience of members and visitors. After questions, a vote of thanks was proposed by the Secretary who presented the President with a bottle of wine and a copy of *The Story of the Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon 1824-2016*.

The Secretary announced the outcome of the ballot about changing the date on monthly meetings held at the January meeting: remain at second Tuesday 14; move to third Tuesday 19; no preference 7. At a meeting of the Committee it was decided that that a change of date might be confusing and to review numbers attending meetings and to revisit this arrangement at the end of the season.