

Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon

The 908th meeting of the Shakespeare Club took place on Tuesday 14 March 2017.

Chris Hill, Director of Sales and Marketing for the Royal Shakespeare Company, spoke about 'Selling Shakespeare', chaired by Sylvia Morris.

Chris Hill's career at the RSC has spanned 27 years and four Artistic Directors. When he joined the Company in 1990 the administrative and creative centre of the RSC was at the Barbican and Stratford was considered an outpost. Since then the RSC had changed into an entrepreneurial organisation which employed in excess of 1000 people (95% of them in Stratford), with over 500,000 people attending their shows every year. 25% of its revenue came from government funding, 25% from earned revenue and 50% from box office. Now Stratford with its unique Shakespearean authenticity was the RSC's home. The excitement of working for the RSC lay always in witnessing the first spark of an idea through to its impact on the stage, mixing with the creative people who worked there and seeing talent nurtured. .

His job was to ensure the RSC appealed to everyone including people who were frightened of Shakespeare . In its application for Arts Council funding as a National Portfolio Organisation the RSC was obliged to submit an audience plan. It had to appeal to minority audiences, addressing both social and ethnic diversity. It was a misconception that Stratford audiences were mainly tourists. In fact only 10% were from overseas, many from the Midlands and then from the UK more widely.

The game-changer in audience development , Mr Hill thought, was the redevelopment of the main house between 2006 and 2008 so that the furthest seat were only 15 metres from its thrust stage. But the Customer Relations Management System that the RSC used not only allowed provided audience data but informed management decisions about the length of a run, for example. He explained the three stages of a marketing campaign, how marketing was refined though the life of a production and how financial targets were attached to each show to monitor its success. One of its greatest challenges and successes has been the marketing of *Mathilda* in the USA where it hadrun for 4 years on Broadway. In fact the press night of this show with the *Henry IV* plays with Robert Stephens in 1991 were his RSC highlights.

Mr Hill ended his talk with the RSC's mission statement: to 'create theatre at its best, made in Stratford-upon-Avon and shared around the world'.

After questions and comments many of which Mr Hill noted for further consideration, the meeting closed at 9pm.