

## THE SHAKESPEARE CLUB OF STRATFORD UPON AVON

**The 856<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Shakespeare Club took place at the Shakespeare Institute on 19 October 2010.** The Chairman, Mrs Jean Lawrance introduced John Curtis, a barrister with the Criminal Cases Review Commission, who was currently writing a thesis on Shakespeare's connection with the law. His subject was Shakespeare in Law rather than the well-worn subject of Shakespeare and the law. Mr Curtis's emphasis was on the links between the modern courtroom and the works of Shakespeare which crop up regularly in judgements as analogues and quotations. He had identified over 400 such references, from 1603 when Sir Edward Coke, in his prosecution of Sir Walter Raleigh, echoed *Twelfth Night* ('thou'st him some thrice') to four instances in 2010. The first direct quotation he had traced was in 1829 when Mr Justice Nichol referred to Shakespeare, asking 'What says the great poet of nature and master of the passions'. Othello and Shylock provided many examples used by judges, and it was judges rather than solicitors and barristers who tended to use Shakespeare in the courtroom, he claimed. Mr Curtis argued that such quotations sharpened logic and commanded attention. He closed his talk with a quotation by a former president of the Shakespeare Club, Lord Justice Norman Birkett, himself quoting Banquo in *Macbeth* (1.3): 'The judge cannot see among the seeds of time which will grow and which will not – he can only do the best he can'.

After questions and a vote of thanks, the meeting ended at 9 pm