

THE SHAKESPEARE CLUB OF STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

The 862nd meeting of the Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon took place at Mason Croft on Tuesday 12 April 2011. The Chair for the evening, Lady Deb Follett, introduced Flip Tanner whose subject was 'In Search of a Proscenium'. Mr Tanner worked for the Royal Shakespeare Company for 19 years, initially in stage management, and in 2002 began work as Project Co-ordinator for the transformation of the RSC's theatres which was completed this year.

Mr Tanner spoke about his search for the origins of the proscenium arch, a project funded by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust in 2004, inspired by a question about the date of the earliest proscenium stage. In the course of the project he visited about thirty theatres: in Spain and Italy where surviving buildings at Almagro in Madrid and Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza are contemporary with Shakespeare but took a very different path, developing prosceniums and perspective scenery. In the USA he saw several large thrust stage theatres and experimental venues that attempted to combine the thrust stage with a proscenium, including a number of replica Elizabethan theatres, for example a reproduction of the Swan Theatre in Chicago. Throughout he was interested in the experience of those who worked on and around these various types of stages. Returning to Stratford and the Memorial Theatre opened in 1932 he recognised the influence of the cinema on its design. The relationship between audience and stage was crucial. In conclusion he answered the question which sent him on his travels: When did the first proscenium arch come about? Answer: The Teatro Olimpico in Italy in 1585.

After questions from the floor and a vote of thanks from the Chair, the meeting closed at about 9pm.