

## THE SHAKESPEARE CLUB OF STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

**The 865<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Shakespeare Club took place at Mason Croft on Tuesday 8 November 2011.** Jean Lawrence took the chair and introduced Rev Dr Paul Edmondson, Head of Research and Knowledge at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust whose lecture was entitled *Muse of Fire?: Shakespeare and the Bible*.

Dr Edmondson began by reminding the audience of the many books, plays and exhibitions which celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the King James version of the Bible. Published too late to have an influence on Shakespeare it is still, along with the First Folio, one of the cornerstones of the English language. Dr Edmondson considered the bibles in use in Shakespeare's time and how the book influenced him.

The history of the bible in English began in 1526 with Tyndale's unofficial translation, using Anglo-Saxon words and "the language of the ploughboy". Between 1526 and 1611 there were 11 translations of the bible, the Geneva bible being the one Shakespeare knew best. Dr Edmondson suggested that Shakespeare's knowledge of the bible was acquired mostly through private reading rather than hearing it read in church. His engagement with it is subtle, running through his work "like an electrical charge" coming to the surface in the plays *Measure for Measure* and *The Merchant of Venice*.

Dr Edmondson went on to compare quotations from the bible with passages in Shakespeare. For example, passages from the erotic *Song of Songs* were shown to be comparable with some of the Sonnets. Dr Edmondson finished by concluding that Shakespeare's use of the bible demonstrated a catholic spirituality, but not a Roman Catholic one, rejoicing in the natural world and uniting soul and body.

Dr Edmondson took questions from the audience and the meeting finished at 9pm.