

## THE SHAKESPEARE CLUB OF STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

**The 874th meeting of the Shakespeare Club took place at Mason Croft on Tuesday 11 December 2012.** The Shakespeare Club's President for the 2012/13 season, Michael Attenborough, spoke about Shakespeare: My Personal View of the Man and His Work, chaired by Roger Pringle.

Mr Attenborough, who is about to step down as Artistic Director of the Almeida Theatre after 11 years to concentrate on directing, appropriately began his talk with his appointment as a Principal Associate Director at the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1990. He held back from Shakespeare until his 1997 production of Romeo and Juliet with Ray Fearon and Zoe Waites who went on to play Othello and Desdemona for him.

His approach to Shakespeare was to find a way to work with actors to make a memorable production. Attenborough looked back over Shakespeare's life and theatre, pointing out that Shakespeare wrote in an age of uncertainty summed up by Hamlet's words: 'What a piece of work is man?' Attenborough's response was that man is the unity of opposites. Shakespeare, more than any other writer, knew that people had infinite shades of colour. This had a direct consequence on the way that Attenborough worked on a play by looking for the antitheses. He spoke of the energy that comes from the pulse of blank verse, how it helped the actor and how his role was to direct that energy. Discovering the content through the form was his key to approaching Shakespeare. He argued that directors had to find a balance between the linguistic tradition of Shakespeare and the influence on contemporary actors of Freud and Stanislavski and that could be done by linking the word to the action, to quote Hamlet again. The director should take actors to the point where they have ownership of the words and can behave instinctively in their roles.

In the last section of his talk Attenborough made a strong defence of the role of the arts in education and argued that Shakespeare gave voice to human experience.