

## THE SHAKESPEARE CLUB OF STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

**The 873rd meeting of the Shakespeare Club took place at Mason Croft on Tuesday 13 November 2012.** Dr Susan Brock, who chaired the meeting, proposed on behalf of the Shakespeare Club Committee that, in order to improve attendance, the AGM should take place before the first meeting of the season at 7.15 rather than in July for a trial year. This was unanimously agreed by members attending the meeting.

The AGM scheduled for July 2013 would now be held on Tuesday 10 September.

Dr Brock introduced Professor Stuart Hampton-Reeves, Professor of Research-informed Teaching at the University of Central Lancashire. The subject of his lecture was "Kent's Best Man - Re-assessing Shakespeare's Jack Cade".

Jack Cade's rebellion dominates the second half of Shakespeare's play Henry VI Part 2. In the course of history he has been seen as alternatively freedom fighter and mindless anarchist. His uprising is based on support from his home county of Kent, and in his final speech Jack Cade claims to have been "Kent's best man". The speaker aimed to investigate whether this could be justified.

Stuart Hampton-Reeves demonstrated this change of perception by surveying the history of the character on stage and page. In nineteenth century America a play cast him as a political hero, but productions of Shakespeare's play have usually treated him as an ignorant villain, his scenes knockabout farce. Several members of the club performed an impromptu reading demonstrating how the speeches of Cade's supporters undermine his authority if spoken as "asides" whereas if performed direct to the audience they confirm his status as an unpredictable and dangerous man.

Hampton-Reeves went on to compare Shakespeare's Cade with his portrayal in the sources. The details of Cade's rebellion in 1450 are more violent in the main source, Hall's Chronicles, than in Shakespeare's play. In the Chronicles Jack Cade is Irish, his Kentish origins and death in a garden in Kent, both invented by Shakespeare. Hampton-Reeves speculated about why Kent was so important to Shakespeare, explaining that as a county it retained liberties lost to the rest of England, and was a traditional hotbed of rebellion. The leader of the Peasants' Revolt, Wat Tyler, for instance, was also from Kent.

After a lively question and answer session and a vote of thanks, the meeting closed at 9.05pm