

## THE SHAKESPEARE CLUB OF STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

**The 876th meeting of the Shakespeare Club took place at Mason Croft on Tuesday 12 February 2013.** The meeting was chaired by Dr Susan Brock who introduced Mr Roger Pringle, the speaker for the evening.

The subtitle of his lecture on Shakespeare's early reputation was "What did they think of him then?". It's commonly assumed that Shakespeare was taken for granted by his contemporaries, and Mr Pringle reviewed and assessed the evidence up to the point where his collected plays were published in 1623.

A surprising amount of evidence exists, from Robert Greene's 1592 ungenerous attack on the "upstart crow", to the official 1603 document in which Shakespeare and his fellows were appointed to be the King's Men. In fact, Mr Pringle argued, Shakespeare's was a success story unparalleled by any writer of the time.

Shakespeare's characters are often concerned about their reputation, and he himself was described as "honest", "sweet" or "gentle", indicating he was well-liked. Mr Pringle looked at a range of sources such as references in books and journals, diaries and borrowings that appear in letters and anthologies. Forty-five editions of Shakespeare's plays and poems appeared during his lifetime, far more than any other author, and Shakespeare's name was placed on the title pages, publishers sometimes making false attributions to encourage sales. Francis Meres' *Palladis Tamia*, in 1598, paid Shakespeare the compliment of comparing him with the most famous Latin authors.

The most generous tribute to Shakespeare came from fellow-playwright Ben Jonson, whose eighty-line poem in the First Folio Mr Pringle described as "one of the finest occasional poems in the language". Jonson states that Shakespeare stands comparison with the greatest of classical writers, above those of his own time. People then and ever since have been following the advice of this book to "Reade him, therefore; and againe, and againe" .

Following questions, and the drawing of a raffle, the meeting closed at 9.15 pm.