

THE SHAKESPEARE CLUB OF STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

The 879th meeting of the Shakespeare Club took place at Mason Croft on Tuesday 10 September 2013. Dr Susan Brock took the chair and introduced Dr Paul Prescott, Associate Professor in the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick, whose lecture was entitled *The Life, Adventures and Opinions of Sam Wanamaker*.

Dr Prescott set out to challenge the popularly-held view of Sam Wanamaker, the founder of Shakespeare's Globe, as a man with lifelong devotion to Shakespeare and an advocate for the authentic production of plays of the Elizabethan and Jacobean period.

Wanamaker left no formal autobiography and Prescott's conclusion came from extensive study of Wanamaker's personal papers. It is usually suggested that his childhood experiences at replica Globe Theatres in the USA were inspirational. But his archives revealed a more complicated story. His early appearance in shortened versions of Shakespeare's plays led him to a profound belief that Shakespeare should be accessible and popular.

Having briefly been a member of the Communist Party, Wanamaker came to England after the war to escape the McCarthy witch-hunts in the USA. His stage career focused on contemporary American drama, and no Shakespeare was programmed when he ran his own theatre in Liverpool. In 1959 he appeared as Iago in Paul Robeson's *Othello* at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, a production intended to shake up the establishment just when British theatre was being redefined.

He founded the Shakespeare's Globe Trust in 1967, and raising the money to build a replica Globe preoccupied him for the rest of his life. He did not live to see the project completed. It had been his aim to create a theatre that would involve the local community, and that would stage just one play a year using original practices. But although the theatre has not developed as he anticipated, he did bequeath a legacy. Shakespeare's Globe has become one of London's most successful performance spaces with a strong educational imperative.

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