

## **The Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon**

**The 893rd meeting of the Shakespeare Club took place at Mason Croft on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2015.** Mary Reardon took the chair and introduced Dr Sophie Duncan who spoke on 'Shakespeare and the Suffragettes'.

Dr Duncan suggested that instead of being merely decorative, the theatre of the Late Victorian and Edwardian period reflected the crucible of ideas sweeping the country. Shakespeare was on the one hand the pillar of the Empire, taking British values to the furthest corner of the globe, while the suffragettes found a justification for militancy in his strong women.

Actresses were highly visible, being role-models for ordinary women and stage favourites with a men, removing concerns that suffrage would make women unattractive. Actresses were also able to move in high society and were financially independent.

Dr Duncan talked about the 1912 production of *The Winter's Tale*, directed by Harley Granville Barker. The trial and imprisonment of Hermione was seen as a parallel to the sufferings of force-fed suffragettes. Paulina emerged as the leading character, the ideal suffragette, a woman who makes things happen for another woman, without male support.

The second part of the talk concentrated on events in Stratford between 1909 and 1913. In 1909 a controversial by-election coincided with the Shakespeare festival. Known suffragettes were in the acting company and each year suffragettes joined in the Birthday parade under a "To be or not to be" banner. In July 1913 a parade of suffragettes passed through Stratford on its way to London and in spite of some opposition there was much local support.

During this period suffragism even featured at the conservative Shakespeare Memorial Theatre where in 1912 known suffragette Violet Vanbrugh played a withdrawn Kate, making Frank Benson's Petruchio a violent bully, a taste of things to come.

Following questions, the meeting closed at 8.55pm.

**The 894<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Club was held on 14th April 2015** when Shakespeare Aloud were scheduled to perform a Shakespearian Entertainment. Due to unforeseen circumstances they were unable to appear. However Club members used the opportunity to hold an Extraordinary General Meeting to make two amendments to the Club rules concerning the date of the Annual General Meeting which will henceforth be held on the date of the first meeting of the season in September. Mr Peter Kyle, Chairman of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, was nominated as President for the 2015/6 season.

The next meeting of the Club will take place at Mason Croft on Tuesday 8 September 2015.