

## Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon

**The 900th meeting of the Shakespeare Club took place at Mason Croft on Tuesday 9 February 2016.** following an Extraordinary General Meeting. The Club Secretary, Dr Susan Brock, sketched a brief history of the Club and explained how meetings had been counted only since April 1874, 50 years after its foundation on 23 April 1824.

Mrs Jean Lawrance took the chair and introduced Dr David Fallow, whose subject was "Shakespeare & Sons – The life and business dealings of John Shakespeare and his sons." Dr Fallow's paper rested on the premise that money can be followed and traced through documentary evidence. It was important to know not just how money was made but when. He argued that William Shakespeare did not make his money in the London theatre and singlehandedly restore the family fortunes. Instead he focused on John Shakespeare's business as a dealer in wool, drawing on evidence of Exchequer records from the 1570s when he was convicted of usury and fined more than once. The size of his transactions showed he was not a small player but a considerable woolbroker, a brogger, who would need a network of people, storage and transport to collect wool and move it to market in London. It was likely that, as managing director of Shakespeare & Sons, he would have employed his own four sons -- including the playwright.

Dr Fallow traced John Shakespeare's family background and his civic career in Stratford between 1560 and 1576, against the background of the wool trade which provided 75% of England's exports by the 1570s and where Midland glovers like John Shakespeare became the most important wool traders. He refuted the idea that the reasons for John's withdrawal from civic life in 1576 were his financial difficulties or recusancy but claimed that it was for the avoidance regulations and taxation on his wool business.

The fragmentation of the wool business nationally coincided with William Shakespeare's lost years, Dr Fallow pointed out, and his appearance in London in the early 1590s could have been in connection with family wool-dealing. He might have left Stratford to avoid paying taxes. William didn't follow his father in civic duties but he was likely to have followed him into the family business nor was it uncommon for actors at the time to have other businesses outside the theatre.

In conclusion Dr Fallow went back to the first biography of Shakespeare by Nichols Rowe which claimed his father as substantial businessman. John Shakespeare, he concluded, was a successful capitalist before that became a term of derision.

After questions the meeting ended at 9.00pm and members enjoyed a glass of champagne and cake to celebrate the Club's 900th meeting.