

## The Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon

The Shakespeare Club's 953rd meeting was held on 14 March 2023 when Rupert Harris, Accredited Conservator-Restorer spoke about his company's restoration of the 1769 statue of Shakespeare on Stratford-upon-Avon's Town Hall. This joint meeting with the Stratford Society was held at the Town Hall and was chaired by Dr Lindsay MacDonald. The clubs were joined by several members of Stratford Town Council.

Dr MacDonald outlined the history of the statue and the Garrick Jubilee at which it was given to the town and referred to the 2022 community fundraising event *Shakespeare's Coming Home!* in which both societies took part.

Mr Harris began by talking about the history of lead statues such as Stratford's. Using illustrations he explained that lead statues were routinely painted to look like marble or bronze. From 1660 onwards continental sculptures were imported and later Huguenot immigrants to this country brought their skills and entrepreneurship, making statues in England where they became fashionable additions to country estates.

The Stratford sculpture was made by John Cheere, a member of one of these Huguenot families. Mr Harris discussed where he might have found his inspiration and cited the work of other sculptors of the period including Roubiliac and Scheemaker. He noted that the Stratford sculpture shows Shakespeare wearing an earring, a feature found only in the Chandos portrait and not in any earlier sculpture. There are also similarities to portraits of David Garrick in his theatre roles. A sculpture made from the same mould now stands in the Theatre Royal Drury Lane. It is thought to have been acquired by the Theatre in the early nineteenth century.

He noted that as well as the unique earring, the Stratford sculpture is unusual in that leans on its left elbow whereas most other sculptures such as that in Westminster Abbey are the other way round. He was unable to explain this discrepancy.

The statue was originally cast in one piece, upside down, using the lost wax method, the structure being supported by an iron core. The worst damage had been caused by the corrosion of this core which expanded and split the lead. He described the process of restoring the statue, which began by first cutting it from its stone plinth. Cleaning with high pressure steam revealed details including the date Sept. 1769, the first dated lead statue he had ever encountered. The rusty core had to be chiselled out, and this necessitated removing part of the back of the statue and its feet. The core has now been replaced with a stainless steel structure supplemented by brackets to distribute the load. Following the work, the surface was worked to match the original. Traces of paint showed it had been stone-coloured and similar paint was applied to the whole statue. The wording on the scroll has been replaced with painted black lettering following exactly the spacing and spelling of the original.

The speaker hoped that the statue would now be good for another 250 years.

The appreciative audience of around 70 asked many questions and all agreed it had been a privilege to be shown the details of the statue and to hear about the fascinating process of restoration.