

## The Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon

The 955<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon took place on 9 May 2023 when former Shakespeare Institute Librarian, now PhD student Karin Thomson, gave a talk entitled *Talking Archives: the Theatre Archive Film Project*. The meeting was chaired by Sylvia Morris. The archives resulting from a theatre production may include prompt books, photos, reviews, designs, music, video and even actual costumes. Interesting as they are, though, they tell only part of the story. The project aims to fill the gaps by reuniting creative professionals with their own documents, interviewing them in order to cast light on the thought processes and influences that contributed to the final production.

Several years ago the Shakespeare Institute devised a new course designed to attract more theatre practitioners whose need to study theatre practices triggered the enlargement of the Institute's script collection, that became the starting point for the Theatre Archive Film Project. The Institute benefits from scripts donated by, among others, Samuel West and Janet Suzman and more recently Sonia Ritter has contributed her heavily annotated script for Lavinia in Deborah Warner's landmark production of *Titus Andronicus*, RSC Swan Theatre 1987.

Ritter's script is being used to showcase the potential of this project, which so far lacks funding. In-depth interviews have been filmed and are being used as raw material for the first documentary. Clips of the interviews were shown in which Ritter commented directly on her notes, recalling details of production, discussions with actors, research she did at the time, and the impact it had on the performance. She was for instance inspired by both the stillness of classical statues, and the shaking of the traumatised. She remembered that actors were encouraged to appeal to the imagination of the audience rather than to be too literal, resulting in the use of liquid clay to represent blood. 331

The aim of the project is to create an educational resource available freely online with a website including images of the documents being discussed and supporting material. Eventually Karin Thomson hopes to acquire a wider variety of documents and interviews from more creatives such as designers and composers. The resource is intended to enthuse people not involved in productions to explore the world of theatre, and to reveal the hidden stories of those who create it.

The talk was also made available online to Club members