

The Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon

The 905th meeting of the Shakespeare Club took place at Mason Croft on Tuesday 13 December 2016. The evening's talk was preceded by a few words from Mr Alan Haigh, Chairman of Trustees of the Stratford Town Trust about arrangements for Shakespeare's Birthday in 2017, especially the Birthday lunch on 22 April to which members of the Club would have priority booking.

The speaker was Alan Smith, Head of the Royal Shakespeare Company Armoury on 'The RSC Armoury and Shakespeare', introduced by Rev. Roger Taylor. The omens were set fair for an entertaining evening as the speaker was accompanied by four dummies displaying exquisite armour made for recent RSC productions: *Richard II* with David Tennant, *Henry V* with Alex Hassall, Congreve's *Love for Love* and *Richard III*. Mr Smith explained that the armoury department was responsible for costume, props, footwear, weapons as well as armour as well as less expected items like pig's heads. The RSC was unique in making all this in house. Everything was stored and reused.

The key to its work was problem-solving – how to interpret a designer's vision or a director's interpretation of a character, how to create the right look while providing actors with wearable costume. The raw materials could be metal leather, plastic or occasionally window blinds from John Lewis and the techniques varied from the traditional leather tooling to vacuum-forming.

Since 1995 the RSC armoury also provided weapons for productions both swords and firearms, for practical fighting and as props. Mr Hill described the precautions taken for their safe use but explained the armoury also made what was known as 'tricksters': arrows in the back, fake daggers, explaining in detail how Dr Faustus drew blood from his own arm in the recent Swan production. The audience was left charmed by Mr Hill's enthusiasm and impressed by the examples of his work. After questions from the audience the meeting closed at 9 pm.

An exit ballot was taken of members attending, about whether to change the day of meetings from the second Tuesday to the third Tuesday of each month to avoid clashes with Orchestra of the Swan concerts.