



BRANCH REPORTS 2017-18

Grahamstown/Makhanda (AGM: 8 October 2018)

2018 has been the centenary year of Guy Butler's birth, and we have enjoyed several opportunities to recall and reflect on the life of our friend and guru. There is scarcely an English-related organisation or institute in this town that does not have the honour of claiming Guy as its founder, and the Shakespeare Society is proud to be one of them. At our Annual Birthday Lecture on 23 April, Prof Paul Walters presented a warm tribute and a penetrating retrospective entitled, "Ripeness is All: Guy Butler as Shakespearean Scholar and Teacher." The event drew a large audience, including a group primed with objections to our commemorating a dead white male writer who goes on about "black rams" and such. They meant Shakespeare – though Guy would not have been unamused had they also included him in their protest. Happily the protestors stayed to the end of Prof Walters' lecture and enjoyed the generous snacks and drinks afterwards.

This year our Reading Group has read *A Comedy of Errors*, *Antony and Cleopatra* (with the English teachers of St Andrew's College and the Diocesan School for Girls), *King Lear* (in anticipation of the Birthday Lecture), *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. Several readings have also been taken 'on tour', as it were. In February we did a week-long course on *Hamlet* with the Grade 12 class at Höerskool PJ Olivier. Tim Huisamen gave an introductory lecture, after which Jeremy Fogg, Warren Snowball, Malcolm Hacksley, Helen Holleman and Lynette Paterson read an abridged version of the play with the learners. I did a follow-up lecture, while Malcolm undertook several tutorials. In March we were there again, this time for a reading of *Macbeth* over three days with the Grade 10 class. Shortly we will read *The Winter's Tale* with Jayne Euvrard's A level class at DSG. My sincere thanks to the members of the ensemble, who are always so willing to bring their reading and teaching skills to these outreach projects. The readings with

schools take a great deal of organisation and commitment. We would like to take the plays further afield as well, and hope that next year we can reconnect with the network of the Shakespeare Schools Festival to pursue links with more schools in the area. SSoSA helped to launch the Shakespeare Schools Festival in Grahamstown four years ago, and in 2015 and 2016 we were closely involved with the participating schools. Once the festival was viable we cut back our participation and for the past two years our only role has been to assist at the final performances. This year Sheila Hicks, Andy Grewar, Jeremy Fogg, Helen Holleman and Lynette Paterson did front-of-house duty. Those of us who stayed to watch the four performances agree that, while it is a very vibrant festival, the level of engagement with the texts could certainly be enhanced, and we hope to return to a more hands-on contribution in future years. Malvern van Wyk Smith made a significant contribution to our outreach to schools by reprising his lecture on the Sonnets, at a conference of Eastern Cape IEB teachers in May. As at its original delivery as the Birthday Lecture in 2017, the talk was very well received and Malvern's scholarship was much appreciated by the audience of English teachers.

Our SSoSA branch seldom meets to watch DVDs anymore, but this year we have had the privilege of seeing several National Theatre screenings at the Monument. Following last year's *Twelfth Night*, we have been able to see *Rozencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*; two *Macbeths* (from the Old Vic and the RSC at Stratford respectively); and *Romeo and Juliet* (RSC). These screenings come to us courtesy of the Monument Movie Club run by Kate Axe Davies, and it is incumbent on SSoSA members to help her make this a sustainable endeavour. I would like to express SSoSA's thanks to Kate for bringing us these films, and to assure her of our ongoing support.

As always, I owe much thanks to my comrades on the committee. Our brand new constitution required us to designate certain portfolios, so the Vice-Chairperson this year has been Warren Snowball, Secretary Trudi Adendorff, and Treasurers Helen Holleman and Malvern van Wyk Smith. Additional member Andrew Renard was joined this year by new member Jeremy Fogg. Though there is no such designated portfolio, Jeremy is our *de facto* Creative Director and as such has been a very welcome addition to the committee. His contribution to the Reading Group is invaluable, and he and his troupe (with Malcolm Hacksley and Paul Walters) again sang for their supper at the AGM as they brought us James Thurber's *Macbeth Murder Mystery*.

For the past two years Jeremy has collaborated with Shakespeare scholar and director Rohan Quince to bring dramatised literary readings to the National Arts Festival – Dickens on the Fringe in 2017 and the World Wars on the Main programme in 2018. Dr Quince has agreed to give the 2019 Annual Shakespeare Birthday Lecture, on the history of Shakespeare productions in South Africa. We look forward eagerly to that, while hoping also that Quince and Fogg will appear again in some guise on the 2019 Festival Programme.

Lynette Paterson (branch chair)

Johannesburg (AGM: 17 June 2018)

The SSoSA Johannesburg Branch followed its usual policy of providing a range of subjects at its monthly meetings, so catering to the wide interests of the members. DVDs are particularly popular and provide matter for discussion.

- June 2017: The AGM was held, followed by a DVD of Michael Pennington performing *Sweet William*.
- August 2017: DVD of Shakespeare's Sonnets by actors including Patrick Stewart, Ian McKellen, Simon Callow, Fiona Shaw and Simon Russell Beale.
- September 2017: DVD of BBC production of *Henry IV, part 1*, part of "The Hollow Crown" series, with Jeremy Irons, Rory Kinnear and Simon Russell Beale.
- October 2017: DVD of *Henry IV, part 2*, with Tom Hiddleston as Hal.
- November 2017: Hilary Semple presented a paper, first given at the Limmud conference in August, entitled "Chaucer, Marlowe, and Shakespeare: anti-Semitic – or not?" Works addressed were Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*, Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. As always, the talk attracted a good audience.
- February 2018: Sadly, musicologist George King was unable to come owing to illness, so a DVD entitled *Being Shakespeare* by Simon Callow was shown. This proved to be very popular with members who were informed and entertained by the formidable talents and knowledge of Simon Callow.
- March 2018: DVD of Episode 3 of John Barton's brilliant series of workshops entitled *Playing Shakespeare*, which dealt with language and character. Actors included Ben Kingsley, Patrick Stewart, Sinead Cusack and David Suchet. The Barton DVDs, with the range of supporting actors used by him, have proved to be invaluable to us in fostering an understanding of Shakespeare.
- April 2018: Shakespeare's birthday was celebrated with lunch and entertainment. Dorothy Ann Gould and Camilla Waldman were our actors, accompanied by songs performed by Eleanor-Mary Cadell, Maggie Mendelsohn and Lyle Smith, and followed by a splendid lunch. This event, in St Columba's Church Hall, was well attended as always.
- May 2018: Back by popular demand, the BBC's *Shakespeare Live! From the RSC*, a performance of the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford to mark the 400th anniversary, in 2016, of Shakespeare's death.
- June 2018: Following the AGM, a DVD of performances of Shakespeare's Sonnets by leading actors including Patrick Stewart, Simon Callow, Fiona Shaw and Stephen Fry.

Our most grateful thanks and appreciation go to Douglas Smith for once again preparing the financial statement for the year ended 31/12/2017.

Eleanor-Mary Cadell (branch chair)

Cape Town (AGM: 24 June 2018)

Six meetings were held during the period 1 June 2017 to 31 May 2018.

- 2 July 2017 *Romeo and Juliet*
- 25 September 2017 *Measure for Measure*
- 5 November 2017 Greg Doran: Is Shakespeare Chinese?
- 25 January 2018 Shakespeare's Extraordinary Understanding
- 25 March 2018 *Measure for Measure* (modern version)
- 11 May 2018 *Troilus and Cressida*

The year's viewing proved to be a mix of dramatised Shakespearean texts and televised lectures. Greg Doran's charismatic lecture emphasised the point that Shakespeare is a global rather than a national 'English' treasure. The meeting of 11 May took the form of an informal discussion of *Troilus and Cressida*. It was agreed to show a DVD version of the play at a later date. Our Vice-Chairman, Vernon Anderson, who had offered to do the catering for that evening, did not arrive and it was only two days after the event that the shocking news of his unexpected death emerged. I wish to express deep sympathy to Vernon's family and to his many friends in Cape Town (bridge players, vintage car enthusiasts and Friends of the Rondebosch Public Library) whose lives he had touched. His unique and intense interest in Shakespeareana will long be remembered in this branch of the Shakespeare Society.

Thank you to members of the branch who this past year took turns to provide the catering. The whole was held together by the ongoing hospitality of Winston and Linda Travis. On behalf of the group, I should like to thank them for making their home available and to Winston especially for the behind-the-scenes activity which has helped to make a success of yet another year.

Geoffrey Haresnape (branch chair)