



Rudyard Kipling

Presented by Peter Wellby

Fri 8th May 2015

When a talk is given, we've generally come to expect a set of slides to illustrate the topic being presented. That certainly wasn't necessary when Peter Wellby spoke of the life of Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936); his knowledge, passion and clarity of diction negated the need for any visual aid. Peter played Rudyard Kipling in a Lewes amateur dramatics performance and in order to learn more about his subject, he read three biographies about him. They weren't the first books he had read about Kipling, having been presented one of his books as a school prize and another, a couple of years later, as a Christmas present.

The talk was specially created for the evening, at the behest of a friend, so we are very grateful for all the effort he put into its preparation.

A clear insight into the life of Kipling was given, how he had ended up living in four continents and the impact it had upon him. Events in early childhood contrasted greatly; from the happy days living in India until he was six years old, followed by a period of being fostered in England whilst his parents were back in India. This was a terrible for him as he felt utterly abandoned and desolate, yet at the age of 11 he (and his younger sister) re-joined them in India for another happy period. "Family square", as they referred to themselves.

Kipling spoke Hindustani as well as he did English and the people that he met and his environment provided much inspiration for future writing. That started with the school magazine and later through work on a newspaper in India. He always slept badly and while living in Lahore he would often go out late at night and talk to the locals, with whom he was familiar. A great characteristic of his was the ability to talk to all people, from the poorest to the nobility.

The two other notable periods of happiness in his life were after marrying Carrie Balestier, which gave him emotional happiness in an otherwise sour marriage, and the first ten years living at Batemans. Of two daughters and one son, one daughter died whilst he was in America and then the son died during the Great War, a loss from which they never recovered.

His work had been greatly admired until the end of the Great War but a change in attitudes against his jingoism and some racial attitudes led to his work falling out of favour, which is still the case today. Despite that, his entries in the Oxford Dictionary of quotations occupy twice the space of Oscar Wilde and Winston Churchill combined. Several attempts were made to knight him but he declined each time, fearing that it would upset his creativity.

This short summary certainly does not do justice to Kipling, or to Peter's enthusiasm and ability.