



Report on StratFire Project in 2023

The Society was awarded a grant by Historic England in 2022 for a four-year project to date through dendrochronology selected buildings along the Historic Spine thought to have been affected by the fires of 1594/5 and 1614. Associated volunteer research led by Bob Bearman into buildings and families in occupation at that time will seek to explore the impact of these fires on individuals and the economy of Stratford upon Avon. The grant awarded totalled £40,625 predominantly funds building archaeologists providing the detailed targeting for the dendrochronologist appointed by HE to undertake sampling. At the start of 2023 funding was increased by £480 to facilitate public engagement, giving a total grant of £41,105.

Project income and expenditure

Grant spend is determined by the availability of building archaeologists, access negotiated with multiple stakeholders, and also the feedback loop from Historic England's work funded from their budget for dendrochronological sampling and subsequent lab based dating. Both ends of the process have proved challenging and have impacted the achievable spend in the year, although not the input from the voluntary research aspect of the project which has continued apace. That too cannot be completed until dating has been successfully achieved through Historic England's contribution to the project. It is for Historic England to decide when, from their budget to apply more expensive dating techniques given the quality of Oak samples achieved, or the hard-to-date Elm and Ash revealed in individual buildings.

Dendrochronology Progress

21 Chapel Street – Chaucer's Head Bookshop sampled in July 2022, during 2023 the research and final report reached an interim stage pending any decision by Historic England to apply more expensive dating techniques.

36 High Street – Ecco Shoes The final report was completed in 2023 and the scientific dating report published by Historic England.

22 Chapel Street – Nash's House was surveyed on 24 August and sampled on 17 October 2022. Finalisation awaits Historic England's scientific data report.

25 High Street – Garrick Inn was also surveyed on 24 August and sampled on 18 October 2022. With interim dendrochronology results in February 2023 an interim scientific data report has been released by Historic England, meaning draft documented histories have been prepared pending any further scientific dating

14-19 Chapel Street – Shakespeare Hotel Sampling took place in January 2023, with interim dendrochronology reports in March. Documented histories have been prepared but the scientific data report has remained at the interim stage.

23-24 High Street – Tudor House was surveyed and sampled in May 2023. Scientific dating reports are awaited which will enable completion of historic building and research reports.

26 High Street – Harvard House was surveyed in May 2023 to supplement existing reports. Sampling is planned for early 2024.

27/28 High Street – Hoorays was surveyed in July and sampled in September 2023. Results of scientific dating are awaited at the close of the year. The Antique Centre at 59-60 Ely Street, which forms the back range of 28 High Street, was also surveyed.

19/20 High Street – Hathaway Tea Rooms was surveyed in August 2023. Sampling awaits access to 21 High Street for surveying 19-21 having been built as one.

Documentary Histories

Dr Robert Bearman, assisted by a volunteer team, has completed documentary histories of most of the buildings listed above. In addition, work has been carried out on 6 buildings (**12 Chapel & 1 Ely St, 13 Chapel St, 22 High St, 32 High St, 33-4 High St and 35 High St**) where no trace of the 16th or 17th century building remains through subsequent demolition. One of the project outcomes is to identify *all* sites in High St and Chapel St affected by the fire in order to build up a more rounded picture, reflecting the fact that while the project focused on 20 named addresses, around 50 buildings in total may be of interest to the project objectives.

Communications

Ellie Stevenson has been engaged as Communications Officer for the project. Articles on the project appeared in the Stratford Herald on 12th May and 28th September. In October a Blog post examined the impact of the fires and in December with publication of the 36 High Street results a further blog and article was written. A communications review led to a complete restructuring of the Societies website pages devoted to the project. The society's web site is updated with the latest draft and finalised reports as the project progresses.

<https://www.stratfordsociety.co.uk/stratfire>

[Houses in High Street \(stratfordsociety.co.uk\)](https://www.stratfordsociety.co.uk/houses-in-high-street)

[Houses in Chapel Street \(stratfordsociety.co.uk\)](https://www.stratfordsociety.co.uk/houses-in-chapel-street)

Steering Group

Three meetings of the Steering Group were held during 2023 to keep stakeholders up to date with progress. Challenges remain in negotiating access and the availability of team members matching with access slots. Historic England are aware of the challenges and are well used to the need to slip budget provision between financial years given that this is a project with multiple stakeholders to consider for each building who have no obligation to participate.

Jonathan Devereux
StratFire Project Manager