



StratFire Project Report

The Society was awarded a grant 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 documentary research by volunteers, 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, totalling £40,625, predominantly funds building archaeologists providing the detailed targeting for the Historic England appointed dendrochronologist to undertake sampling. In the year an initial draw down of restricted funds was paid of £10,000.

Project start-up

On 18th April Dr Nat Alcock launched the project with a talk to Society members. The public launch followed on 26th May with over 20 volunteers signing up for the research team, and the first steering group meeting. The HE dendrochronologist was announced on 10 May, with the appointee Martin Bridge available from June.

Dendrochronology Progress

21 Chapel Street – Chaucer’s Head Bookshop was surveyed, and sampling completed on 25 July. This revealed that much of the building was constructed of Elm – a common local timber resource in Stratford of the period, but much harder to date than Oak.

36 High Street (Ecco Shoes) was also sampled with completion on 26 July. Initial results suggested a date 1459–91. The research team proposed a likely rebuild date of 1473, which would fit within that range, and the HE team by the end of 2022 was seeking ways of narrowing the date range. The result is an exciting find for such a plain building.

22 Chapel Street – Nash’s House was surveyed on 24 August and sampled on 17 October. It is constructed almost entirely of Oak with limited amounts of Elm. The results were awaited at the year end.

25 High Street – Garrick Inn was also surveyed on 24 August and sampled on 18 October. Again mostly Oak with limited Elm and results awaited.

14-19 Chapel Street – Shakespeare Hotel was reviewed by building archaeologists on 15 December, with sampling taking place early in the new year (25 January 2023). Repeated the pattern of timbers found, this site is extensive, covering roughly the same area as the first four sites combined.

Tudor House, 23-24 High Street, and Harvard House, 26 High Street, were identified as targets for early 2023, largely because they complete the story for the Garrick Inn.

Documentary Research

Bob Bearman’s team met for two group meetings (Harvard House), and ten study sessions at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust with draft building histories completed for the first four properties surveyed. The process of reviewing prominent families means that work is progressing on the wider 50 buildings of interest (whether still standing or not) beyond the 20 identified specifically for dendrochronology.

Steering Group

Three steering group meetings have been held updating stakeholders. Challenges remain in negotiating access to sites and availability of team members matching with access slots. HE is aware of the impact of the late start and specific team member availability, challenges leading to a restricted fund carry forward at the close of the year.

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