RICHARD QUINEY (1557-1602)

Prominent amongst the names of collectors after the fires of the 1590s is that of Richard Quiney.

Documents examined by the StratFire Project show that, in the first month after the fire of 1594, Quiney travelled to Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire, raising £36.2s.8d – more than half of the total sum collected to repair fire damage. But against this, he set expenses, such as the hire of horses, of £22.5s.5d.

For generations, Quiney's family were successful mercers (merchants or traders) in Stratford, and Richard was a prominent citizen, holding a number of Corporation offices or roles: principal burgess (1580), Chamberlain (1587) and Alderman (1588). Yet not everyone thought him fit to hold public office. In 1592, Sir Edward Greville, lord of the manor, opposed Quiney's appointment as Bailiff. Greville was a dangerous enemy to have, as Quiney was to find out!

The cumulative effect of the fires of 1594 and 1595, which destroyed corn in barns around the town, led to food becoming unaffordable, and the highest death toll of the century. An inquiry made of the amounts being held by citizens of Stratford found that:

'Master Richard Quiney useth of trades of buying and selling corn

for great sums and the making of malt.'

In 1598, Quiney calculated that 400 citizens of Stratford were on poor relief.

As well as Quiney's reputation as a successful trader, he was the author, in 1598, of the only surviving letter addressed to William Shakespeare – although probably never delivered. This asked him to secure a loan of £30 *'for all the debettes I have in London'*. The outcome of this request is not known.

In 1602, while once again holding the office of Bailiff, Richard Quiney apparently met a dramatic end. Tradition has it that he died from injuries sustained when he was set upon in a tavern by followers of Sir Edward Greville. But this story must be treated with caution as it is recorded that Quiney continued to carry out his duties for some weeks following the attack.