

## In 1910 shop rent was £40 a year in Stratford

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**FORTY pounds a per year to rent a shop in High Street, Stratford sounds ideal...but you would need to travel back to 1910 to secure the deal.**



An oak sample extracted for dating from 36 High Street

It's another one of those historic gems the StratFire Project is discovering during its investigation of buildings in the town centre which have been around for centuries but only now giving up their secrets thanks to an ongoing tree-ring dating of timber frames (dendrochronology) to see how old the structures are and whether or not they were ravaged by fires in the Tudor era.

In High Street ECCO shoes – as it is now known – has three floors, a shop front below and brick frontage but behind this exterior lies a hidden history and connections to Shakespeare.

Analysis by StratfFire of oak roof trusses on the second floor of the building and oak beams on the ground floor passageway, indicates the trees were sourced locally and most likely felled between 1463 and 1477. This coincides with historical research which records in a 1473 lease that the then tenant, a Roget Paget, had to rebuild the property.

The StratFire project aims to look at timber-framed houses in High Street and Chapel Street and how they may have been affected by the disastrous fires of 1594 and 1595 and also the later fire of 1614.

The study of number 36 found no evidence of historical fire damage or discolouration and it's interesting to wonder why? In any event, it was clearly not burnt to the ground nevertheless, the investigation into the property has still revealed a great deal.

When Roger Paget, a wealthy mercer (dealer in textiles) leased the building in 1473, it was called the Clockhouse and as well as being required to rebuild it he was also obliged to put in place a warden to look after the bell and clock (hence the name) attached to the building.

Seven years later, the clock was removed to the market cross, which then stood at the corner of High Street and Wood Street. The house was still known as the Clockhouse in 1500 around which time Paget died.

While remnants of the old timbers remain, much has been lost of the now Grade II listed building including a magnificent stone fireplace and, on the first floor, late 16th century panelling

In 1616, the year of his death, Shakespeare's youngest daughter, Judith, married Thomas Quiney. They lived at Number 1 High Street, on the corner of Bridge Street, the cellar of which was once part of an early town gaol, known as The Cage.

Further up the road was number 36 and in the sixteenth century the house was held by Adrian Quiney under a lease from the Stratford Corporation. Adrian was Thomas Quiney's grandfather and, on Adrian's death, the lease passed to his son Richard, and then to Richard's widow Elizabeth. It was Elizabeth who, in 1612, arranged that the lease should go to her son Thomas – the same Thomas who, four years later, married Judith Shakespeare, and transferred his business across the road to number one.

The Quineys (or Quyny) didn't always live in the property but their connection to the house can be traced back to when the freehold belonged to the Guild of the Holy Cross. After the guild was suppressed, the site passed, along with others, to the recently incorporated Borough of Stratford-upon-Avon in 1553

Along with research for the StratFire Project, the tree-ring dating has revealed more about the site of 36, High Street in this early period and despite the building's early 18th century appearance, dendrochronology has shown that at its heart is a timber-framed structure. The StratFire project is examining the effect of the fires of 1594 and 1595 on the town's buildings. If either of the fires spread as far north as 36 High Street, they didn't lead to complete destruction of the building. A survey of corporation property from 1599, which refers to fire damage, backs this up, as no. 36 is not included in the list of buildings needing repair.

The property's present look can be attributed to a 1758 lease, which instructs the incoming tenant to 'new front the said house with brick' but the work may not have been done immediately and could have been left as late as the 1790s.

In the 1900s the building was occupied by the Public Benefit Boot Co. on a 14-year lease with an annual rent of £40. This company – which was formed in 1875 was in fact a shoe shop, a chain store with 143 branches in 1920.

Bob Bearman, StratFire research coordinator said: "The tree-ring dating was a real surprise. It showed that even if the fire got that far, it didn't completely destroy the earlier building and to find a document of 1473 that confirmed the tree-ring date was a real bonus."