

The inside story on an old Stratford inn

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MANY centuries ago Alice Poynton allegedly ran a brothel at the Garrick Inn.

This historic timber framed building has been a popular watering hole in the town for generations of Stratfordians but what you see on the outside isn't the complete picture especially when it comes taking a closer look at its structure and frame.



24-27 High Street, Stratford, 1910.

The Garrick, or number 25 High Street, is on Stratford's historic spine and is located in the heart of the town's conservation area.

It's been a Grade II listed building since 1951 and the inn has an amazing history some of which has been uncovered as part of the Stratford Society's StratFire project which is examining the town's history in the context of the fires that hit the area in 1594, 1595 and 1614.

The Garrick is said to have been the place where the town's plague of 1564 started and has been an inn since 1718. Then, it was called the Reindeer, and its landlord was William Walford who was previously a shoemaker.

In 1795 it was known as the Greyhound but changed its name to the Garrick in honour of the renowned and much celebrated actor David Garrick who boosted tourism in Stratford thanks to his glorious portrayal of characters in Shakespeare's plays.

The building is three storeys at the front (although originally two storeys possibly) and two storeys to the rear with a two storey projection at the side.

Thanks to historical research and dendrochronology (tree-ring dating) the Stratford Society's StratFire project has been able to learn a lot more about the Garrick's history.

In the early nineteenth century the building was re-fronted in brick and in 1910 it's described as red brick and tiled from the street but otherwise it's old and has two attic rooms, two bedrooms, and the Oak Room on the first floor which was used by David Garrick.

The building stretches back a long way and is divided into many small rooms which was common in times past.

A building on the site of the Garrick can be traced back to 1446 when it was occupied by John Pebworth who was a barber. He was followed by others including an Alice Poynton who, it appears, ran a brothel. She may later have married Thomas Corbet, a barber. Further tenants followed.

Sadly, the Garrick, and a smaller cottage at the back (number 60, Ely Street), then separated from the main house and were both badly damaged by the fires of 1594 and 1595. At that time, the main house was tenanted by Thomas Deege, a weaver (and possibly a refugee from Flanders), who had been in the house for decades. The tenant in the smaller cottage was a Philip Green who was given a lease in 1580.

In 1595, Deege, presumably daunted by the cost of rebuilding, surrendered his lease. He was admitted to the alms-houses a year later where he died within months. Green also surrendered his lease in 1595.

Several years later, in 1598, Richard Quiney, the future father-in-law of Judith Shakespeare, gave Green £8 of the fire relief money he'd been authorised to collect.

Dendrochronology on the Garrick Inn, indicates that felling of some of the trees used in the building occurred between 1588 and 1610 (with a 95.4 per cent probability), using local timber.

While felling doesn't necessarily indicate usage, this fits well with re-construction after the 1594/1595 fire. It's also possible that some of the timber in the building dates from an earlier time, having been reused.

The Garrick Inn today is not just a great pub, it has a memorable history. Outside, there are some interesting carvings on the brackets of the corner posts. Inside, during the 1913 restoration, a well was found, over 30 feet deep and with eight feet of water.

Not surprisingly, it's covered over today, but if you walk down the passage and look to the right, the place where it was is still visible. As is the building's character. It's not that difficult, once inside, to image yourself back in the past.