

## **“Stratfire” project**

### **Documentary research group**

#### **Report to Steering Group 14 September**

1. Of the twenty or so volunteers who expressed interest in helping with the documentary research, around fifteen have remained committed to the project. We have had two general meetings since the launch, the first at Foundation House and the second at Harvard House. At the first meeting I explained in more detail the overall aims of the project and the vital contribution that detailed documentary research will provide. This will establish the buildings that were affected, the time it took to rebuild or repair them, the families who bore the cost of this and the wider effect of these urban fires on the town’s economy.
2. The documentary research will focus on building up two master data sets. One will be subdivided by the sixty or so buildings that stand (or stood) in High Street and Chapel Street and will trace the history of their ownership and occupancy over the period 1570-1650, including, of course, any evidence of fire damage.
3. The second set will be subdivided by the families known to have been associated with these properties over the same period. This is less easy to quantify as additional names may come to light during the research but previous studies have identified some 50 families associated with these properties over the planned period whose fortunes may be reflected in their changing status and the state of their finances before and after the 1594/5 fires. The research will not be confined to buildings which still stand. Documentary evidence may still survive for buildings since demolished and if this yields information on fire damage (or not), it will become an important part of the assessment of overall damage.
3. The methodology is for volunteers to choose a family likely to have been affected and then to enter raw data about it into a standard table in chronological order. This will include such things as family structure and relationships, its members’ occupations, any evidence of business activity, social standing and public service, and when the family settled in Stratford and whether it remained settled there. This evidence will not be derived simply from secondary works (though a background reading list has been circulated) but from documentary sources. Some of this material has already been edited, published or transcribed (notably the parish registers but also the proceedings of the Stratford Corporation, in six, soon to be seven, volumes) and so work has initially concentrated on these. However, these sources, though many are in print or available online, some are not or may be difficult to access. Arrangements have therefore been made with the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust for groups of five, under my supervision, to visit the Trust’s Reading Room to work on these. The first of these will be held shortly.
4. By the time of our second meeting the volunteers had ‘adopted’ twenty-six families and a few have submitted to me trial samples. The main purpose of the meeting was to clarify the form in which the entries should be made so that minimum editing will be required. My particular responsibility will be to copy any of the evidence relating directly to the history of properties in High Street and Chapel Street (and nearby) into the ‘Buildings’ master set, not only as backup for the dendrochronological investigation but also on the known extent of the fire(s).

*Robert Bearman*

14.9.2022