StratFire: who suffered when fires struck the town?

While the StratFire Project has concentrated on the fires that affected many properties in High Street and Chapel Street, Stratford-upon-Avon in the 1590s, these were not the first fires to affect the town centre.

In 1582, there had been a fire that caused problems for some of the town's leading families. In November of that year, Stratford Corporation – itself a major property owner in the town – lost no time in ordering that a group of aldermen and burgesses:

'shall view all the messuages, lands, tenements, woods and underwoods belonging to the baylife and burgesses of the borough and… to make certificate… of such houses as they shall find ruinous and what number of trees there shall be on the said lands growing.'

The report came back that there were many buildings requiring restoration. Fortunately, at that time, the town was surrounded by around 1,000 elm trees which could provide material for rebuilding. Indeed, the object of the exercise was probably to encourage the Corporation's tenants to put their buildings in good repair. A sub-committee was then authorised to sell off as many elms as were thought to be worth a total of ten pounds.

One prominent citizen to suffer fire damage in 1582 was Adrian Quiney, who was the bailiff at that time. His family owned and occupied two adjoining houses in High Street, on the sites of today's Nos. 30 and 31. We don't know which of these two buildings was affected by the fire, but the records show that the Corporation ordered that Quiney,

'shall have towards his building lately perished with fire six elms to be delivered to him by the now chamberlains.'

Recognising that there could well be further fires in a town with so many timber buildings, the Corporation also ordered that, *'for the defence against Fyre',* every alderman shall provide two leather buckets, and every burgess one bucket.