

**Friends of Ware Priory Annual General Meeting held on
13 March 2025 at 7.15pm
Hadsley Room, Ware Priory
Minutes**

Present: Janet Parkin (Chairman), Kate Belinis (minutes), Sylvia Hovell (Administration Officer), Christine Woodward, Margaret Cox (Treasurer), Dennis Day, Rosemary Chamberlain, Barry Parkin, Ron Baber, John Wing, Cllr Victoria Shaw; Sean Shaw, Phyllis Ballam, Judi Thomson

Welcome: Chairman opened meeting by welcoming everyone.

1 Apologies received from: Jay and Mike Salter, Sue and Barry Sharples, Kathy Sanders, Georgina and Colin McIntyre, Betty Day, Alan and Pauline Brothers, Keith and Katherine Perry

2 Minutes of Annual General Meeting: held on 15th March 2024 were received, and agreed to be a correct record.

Proposed by Phyllis Ballam seconded by Christine Woodward.

Chairman signed the minutes as a true record.

3 Matters Arising – There were no matters arising.

4 Chairman's Report for 2024/25

The Friends' Committee met 5 times in the period March 2024 to February 2025 including the AGM.

Events - held over the past twelve months:

Our first event, following the AGM was a quiz evening on 19 April – a very successful evening, as they usually are, with Sean Shaw as our quizmaster.

This was followed by our **Summer Social** on Sunday 30 June in the conservatory which was, again, well supported. As usual, a lovely afternoon tea was organised by the committee.

Then came **Ware Festival** on Saturday 06 July with our double stall in its usual place, under the chestnut tree on the front lawn. It was a wet beginning to the afternoon, but the weather did improve, and we managed to make a very respectable net profit of over £300.00. As in 2023 we diversified our offer – so, as well as plants and produce, we had Jay Salter's superb home-made chutney – if you have not tried it, you really should! She makes it in all sorts of 'yummy' flavours; home-made greetings cards – thanks to committee member Rosemary Chamberlain; a selection of hand-made attractively painted wooden planters and fabric bottle bags, courtesy of members Dave and Val Norton and a tombola – thank you to Kate Belinis for organising that. Did we have anything else? Apologies if I have overlooked anything. Many thanks to those who helped before, after and on the day.

More recently, we had a New Year Social which was held on Friday 17 January in the conservatory. Another enjoyable evening. Entertainment was provided by the very talented saxophonist grandson of Sylvia, Rowan Edwards. Rowan has entertained us before – the first time in 2022, I believe. This time he was due to be part of a trio and be accompanied by two guitarist friends. Sadly, however, his two friends were unwell – but to save the day, Rowan's Dad, Gary, and Gary's friend Peter – also both guitarists – stepped in to join Rowan – so there was a trio after all. It was excellent. Thanks to Sean and Kate for the quizzes.

Right – on to **Projects**, which is a regular item on our agenda at committee meetings. We do have on-going Projects – the Friends' Garden being one of them. Seasonal planting takes place in the planter and planting pockets in and around the Garden. The metal seats are touched up with appropriate paint, as necessary. There is a team of community workers who help out in the Priory grounds, usually once a week, and, when reminded, they sweep the paved areas on each of the stream.

Hanging baskets in the Priory car park is another continuing initiative of the Friends. We have been arranging for the planting of these baskets for several years. These are the baskets which hang from the lighting columns in the car park. They definitely serve to enhance the front aspect of the Priory Grounds. We get the planted baskets from the Ware in Bloom group at advantageous prices and are grateful to Matt Watkins and the Priory team for keeping the baskets watered.

Swift nesting boxes – which are on the gable end of Fletcher's Lea. I asked Friend's member Ron Baber, whose initiative this is, for an update and he suggested I copy and paste my report from last year! In other words, the only interest has been from some bluetits again!

History Board – the replacement history board (adjacent to the hedge on the front lawn) has been in place for over three months now. It looks very good. If you have not noticed it, take a look as you leave this evening.

Bench on Back Lawn – as reported last year, Friends commissioned a metal bench to be installed on the circular paved area on the back lawn. This is now in place and looks quite handsome. We hope that it will be well used in the coming months.

Gosselin prints – from the collection of a member of the Gosselin family who had lived in the Priory - thanks to John Wing for having nine old photographs reproduced and framed together with an explanatory note. John had brought them to the meeting to show members prior to them being hung in the Oriel corridor, on the Priory first floor.

NOW – as you are all well aware 2025 is the 30th anniversary of the formation of the Friends of Ware Priory. This has been the subject of some discussion in recent meetings of the committee. We shall be discussing this further with you under Agenda Item 6 tonight.

But, before we continue to the financial section of the meeting, I must pay tribute to the Friends' committee members – who all play a very active part. They are a great group of people. I think that they are all here this evening apart from Jay Salter who is on holiday.

Thank you very much to you all. Your help and support have made my job as Chairman so much easier.

5 Treasurer's Report & Examined Statement of accounts for the period ended 31 December 2024

The Statement of Accounts had been circulated by Margaret Cox, Treasurer, who reported on the projects' expenditure. There being no queries, the examined accounts were approved. Noted there was a balance of £2044.45 in the bank. See attached report. Chairman thanked Margaret for the report.

Proposed by Ron Baber and seconder Rosemary Chamberlain

6. To note that 2025 will be the 30th anniversary. of the formation of the Friends of Ware Priory

Chairman confirmed that the committee is stepping down and asked if there was any interest from anyone present who would be interested in taking this on and forming a new Committee. There was no interest expressed.

Chairman then reminded the meeting of the statement she had sent out with the AGM papers to members (almost 60 in number) plus the Town Clerk and Priory Trustees, notifying them of the Committee's intention to wind up "having successfully and conscientiously completed 30 years following the objectives as laid out in the Friends' constitution. We are proud of what we have achieved over this period but feel we have now reached the time to call it a day."

In the same notice Chairman invited comments on the proposal.

The Chairman reported that the following members had sent comments with their apologies:

Sue and Barry Sharples: "I, Sue, am a native of Ware, but we've lived away for quite a while. Thank you for all the information about the AGM, and the decisions facing the committee. I would be sorry to see FOWP close but would accept the view of the local members who are more aware of the detailed circumstances. We wish to thank the committee and many others for the useful tasks that the group has undertaken. They have done a great deal to improve the looks of the Priory and its surroundings."

Kathy Sanders: "After thirty years it seems sad that the committee has had to come to this decision. I know of several organisations that are having to make this decision. Reluctantly I'm afraid I have to agree and come to the same conclusion."

Georgina McIntyre: "Regrettably, I can't be with you this evening. Over the past 30 years, the 'Friends' have raised thousands of pounds to provide much needed facilities in and around the Priory grounds. I served as a committee member for a large part of this time, mostly as Treasurer.

I feel the present Committee has made the correct decision to terminate the FOWP. Nothing can go on forever and 30 years is an appropriate time to 'wind up'."

Alan and Pauline Brothers: "Although we haven't been members for very long and have enjoyed every event, we have attended we feel the most sensible action would be to call it a day for the group. It is getting like many organisations we belong to the younger generation are not interested in joining and it's difficult to keep going.

Thank you and everyone involved for making us so welcome."

Katherine and Keith Perry: "Well done to all. Thank you to all who have supported the group. Agree that it is time to call it a day."

Members were disappointed that there were no Council representatives present at the meeting, apart from Councillor Victoria Shaw, and no apologies had been received.

John Wing provided a brief account of how FOWP was formed. In the mid 1980s the fabric of the Priory buildings was in poor condition. After several years and plans, a fundraising group was established to generate funds to support some of the refurbishment work needed. The buildings and grounds were finally completed in 1994 when the Duke of Gloucester opened the newly refurbished Priory and its grounds. The fundraising group ceased, and the Friends of Ware Priory was established in 1995. John said we should record that the key volunteer who worked tirelessly since the inception is Sylvia Hovell who was acknowledged and thanked.

John said he agreed with the Friends' decision.

Phyllis Ballam recalled that local people wanted the Town Council to ensure that both the Priory and its grounds were maintained for the benefit of the people of Ware. Chairman reminded the meeting that what FOWP provided were the “little” add-ons and enhancements such as the hat/coat stands, one of which, it was noted, was in use in the room that evening. It was not in the Friends’ remit to fund items which should be funded by the Town Council.

Chairman said that at the AGM last year she had reported that in financial terms the works funded over the past 29 years directly by Friends was over £26,500 and over £43,000 where Friends has been instrumental in gaining grants/donations and sponsors. That figure would now be higher due to projects completed over the past year.

It was announced that the committee will be arranging a last Summer Social on Sunday 22 June. The question of how to deal with consumables and catering equipment bought over the years and its disposal will be considered in due course.

The AGM attendees agreed that the decision to close was a right one.

7. To agree Subscriptions for 2025.

As the committee had announced its intention to step down and the proposed winding down, the matter of subscriptions was not progressed.

8. Election of Committee Members

As the current committee is standing down and Friends winding up, there was no need for this.

9. Election of Examiner for 2025 Accounts

Chairman was pleased to report that Sarah Edwards, who has been fulfilling this role, is willing to continue to do so. It was agreed Sarah Edwards be selected as the Friends of Ware Priory’s Independent Examiner for 2025.

Proposer: Rosemary Chamberlain Second: Christine Woodward

10. Any other business

10.1 Website: Ron Baber reminded the meeting that the hosting fee will expire in November 2025.

Final arrangements to be discussed at the March committee meeting.

10.2 Documentation: Judi Thomson suggested Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS) be approached to archive all Friends’ documents.

10.3 Any surplus FOWP funds will be handed over to The Priory Charity as per our constitution – however, it is hoped that all funds will have been spent.

10.4 Strong feelings were expressed that members and guests will miss our social gatherings as they have always been enjoyed by all.

Meeting closed 20.10pm