

## 2 Chairman's Report for 2022/23 to the AGM.

The Friends' Committee met 5 times in the last year – all in person – no Zooms. Hopefully, meetings by Zoom are behind us now.

Our first fund-raising event since 2019 was a quiz on Friday 22 April. It was a very successful and enjoyable evening in Fletcher's Lea which raised over £500.00. Many thanks to Sean Shaw our quiz master and to the committee who organised the refreshments.

This was followed by our Summer Social on Sunday 12 June – again, the first for a couple of years. Since 2022 was the Queen's Platinum Jubilee year we had a royal theme – the buffet even included a plate of marmalade sandwiches. Many thanks to Jay for providing those. It was well supported. We were pleased that the Mayor, Councillor Rishi Ferdinand also joined us – and we had a surprise visit from the Queen, Prince Charles and Princess Anne. Thanks to Rosemary, Jay and Mike. Checkout our website for photos. Other entertainment was provided by Rowan, Sylvia's grandson, who royally entertained us, most professionally, with two pieces on his saxophone – plus an encore.

Then came Ware Festival and we were once again under the chestnut tree on the front lawn, with our plants, produce and other items. Well worthwhile, as usual, but quite a long day. Over £300 was raised. Many thanks to those who helped on the day. We'll be in the same spot on Saturday 1 July this year. Help is always needed – setting up, manning and packing up as well as gifts of plants, produce etc. to sell.

Members will receive a call for help in due course.

Our Christmas Social was planned for December as usual but it transpired that there was "no room at the inn" and we had to reschedule for the New Year. So our Christmas Social became a New Year Celebration and was held on Friday 13 January. This actually worked well. We were entertained by Lloyd Crowley and his Ware Ukulele Band – great fun and a very enjoyable evening. We have decided to make it a New Year event in future rather than hold it before Christmas.

This year, our first event will be the Summer Social on a Sunday in June – not sure yet which Sunday – it depends on the availability of accommodation, but members will be notified in due course. Because it is a Coronation year, it is likely it will, once again, have a royal theme. I look forward to seeing you there.

On to **Projects**, which is a regular item on our agenda at committee meetings.

We do have on-going projects – the **Friends' Garden** is one of them.

We are presently having work done on the paving and hard landscaping. We commissioned, and erected, a special platinum jubilee commemorative plaque – to match the diamond jubilee plaque we had installed in 2012. Sadly, the platinum jubilee plaque disappeared and we have had to have another one made. This is now installed.

**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 now. 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 are able to get the plants from the Ware in Bloom group at advantageous prices. We are grateful to Matt Watkins and the Priory team for keeping the baskets watered.

**Swift nesting boxes** – these were installed on the gable end of Fletchers' Lea in 2019 but, sadly, the swifts haven't found them yet. This is an initiative of Ron Baber, who regularly checks the call system and makes sure that everything is in order. It is still too early for this season. But, as in previous years, we are keeping our fingers crossed!

**Revamping and replanting of the riverside berm** – the berm is the area adjacent to the river by the small island – looking towards the putting green. Over thirty years ago there was a small landing stage there which a local model boat society used regularly. I have reported previously that the

Wednesday Volunteers – a group of retirees who do voluntary conservation work, revamped this area a couple of years ago by taking out overgrown plants, weeding and planting new aquatic plants, which the Friends funded. Last year we realised that the area would benefit from a few more plants, so the Wednesday Volunteers returned last April to carry out additional planting. They are making a return visit next month for a general tidy-up. We are very grateful to them for their continuing help and support.

As part of the Platinum Jubilee year we took part in the **Queen's Green Canopy** initiative and purchased a single stem Amelanchier tree. This was planted in the border alongside the Priory drive last November. I am pleased to report that it seems to have settled in well and is beginning to show signs of life.

**History Board** – The History Board, which the Friends provided, and is located adjacent to the turning bay at the front of the Priory, is showing signs of wear and parts are becoming illegible. We have, therefore, decided to replace it. We are also taking the opportunity to check the text and make sure the information on it is accurate and up to date. Committee member, John Wing, is checking this for us.

**Website** – you should, by now, know that we have an excellent website – run by Ron Baber. Many thanks to you, Ron. Please check it out [www.friendsofwarepriory.org.uk](http://www.friendsofwarepriory.org.uk).

The Town Council also appoints a representative to serve on its committee. This is presently Councillor Mrs Victoria Shaw, who has been our representative for almost four years. The Town Council rep acts as an interface between the Town Council and the committee and keeps us informed of items of interest relating to the Priory and its Grounds. Thank you, Victoria, for your contribution.

Now, I would like to mention the fact that three of our members have received special civic awards over the past twelve months.

Phyllis Ballam was made an Alderman of the District for her 'many years of dedicated and effective service' and Jan and John Wing were both recently awarded the Freedom of Ware by the Town Council. Congratulations to Phyllis, Jan and John – well deserved.

That brings us right up to date – but before finishing I want to pay tribute to the Friends' committee members – who all play an active part. Amongst them there is a wealth of various and valuable skills and expertise which can be called upon. A big THANK YOU to you all. Finally, a special **Thank You** to Jay, our Secretary, and to Sylvia, our Admin Secretary – who both do so much to actually make things happen – and make my job as Chairman that much easier.