

**Friends of Ware Priory Annual General Meeting held on
15 March 2024 at 7.00pm, Hadsley Room, Ware Priory**

Chairman's Report for 2023/24

The Friends' Committee met 6 times in the period March 2023 to February 2024 including the AGM.

Events - held over the past twelve months:

We had planned a quiz for April 2023 but subsequently discovered that this clashed with the Town Mayor's civic dinner and since our quiz master was also a Town Councillor, we decided to abandon that plan and not to hold a spring fundraising event last year. However, we do have one planned for this April - more on that later.

This was followed by our **Summer Social** on Sunday 11 June in Fletcher's Lea which was well supported. Since this was less than a month after the coronation of King Charles we had a coronation themed table quiz. Entertainment was again provided by Rowan Edwards, Sylvia's grandson, with some pieces on his saxophone - very professional and very enjoyable.

Then came **Ware Festival** with our double stall on its usual site, under the chestnut tree on the front lawn. We diversified a bit this time – although we still offer plants and produce, we are not being given as many as we have in the past. So, we also sell homemade greetings cards – thank you to committee member Rosemary Chamberlain; jars of superb homemade chutney in a wide variety of flavours – thank you to our Secretary, Jay; and a tombola – thank you to Kate for organising that. All very well worthwhile, but quite a long day. Many thanks to those who helped before, after and on the day. We will be in the same spot on Saturday 6 July this year. Help is always needed – setting up, manning, and packing up – just an hour or two is very welcome - as well as gifts of plants, produce, tombola items etc. Members will receive a call for help in due course.

Because the New Year Social (as opposed to a Christmas Social) worked well in 2023 we decided to repeat the format. This was held on 19 January.

We were again entertained by Lloyd Crowley and his Ware Ukulele Band – this time with more members of his band in attendance. Great fun and a very enjoyable evening.

A New Year event will now be the norm.

Forthcoming events:

Our first event will be a fund-raising quiz evening on Friday 19 April – in Fletcher's Lea. We are fortunate in that Sean Shaw has agreed to organise the quiz part of this for us. Please make a note of the date. Traditionally this has been a good event for Friends in terms of funds raised. You should have found a notice about this on your chairs.

The summer social will be held on Sunday 30 June. Information will be sent round to members in due course, but again, please make a note of this date.

Now 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. Maintenance over the year has included replacing the platinum jubilee plaque and attending to some 'trip hazards' in the paved areas. Seasonal planting also takes place in the planter and planting pockets in and around the Garden – many thanks to Sylvia for organising this.

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 – I am sorry to report that the swifts still haven't found the nesting boxes which were installed on the gable end of Fletchers' Lea in 2019. Although last year one box was occupied by blue tits and another by wasps!

This is an initiative of Ron Baber, who regularly checks the call system and makes sure that everything is in order. Some of you may know that St Mary's Church has also recently had swift boxes fitted to its tower. So, the swifts are spoilt for choice! It is still too early for this season. But, as in previous years, we are keeping our fingers crossed!

The Wednesday Volunteers – as reported last year, this group of retirees who do conservation work, returned in April to tidy up the berm. They also did some planting for us in the Friends' Garden and cleared a large amount of rubbish from the stream which runs adjacent to the Friends' Garden. They are due to return on 1st May. We are very grateful to them for their continuing help and support.

Feather Banner - during the year we commissioned a banner to advertise / announce ourselves - which can be used whenever we have events. You can admire it here!

History Board - I reported last year that the History Board, which the Friends provided in the year 2000, and is located adjacent to the turning bay at the front of the Priory, was being replaced. This has taken longer than anticipated. But the text has now been agreed and is shorter and more precise. Committee member, John Wing, has been sorting this out for us. Thank you, John.

Bench on Back Lawn – There is a circular paved area on the back lawn behind the Conservatory and in front of the plane tree. Some of you might remember that there was once a bench on this paved area. To be honest, I can't remember when or why this was removed but the Friends have decided to provide a metal replacement bench (backless, like the original, so that you can sit facing the river or facing the Priory). It should be in place in time to enjoy the better weather.

Website – you should, by now, know that we have an excellent website – run by Ron Baber. Many thanks to Ron. Please check it out www.friendsofwarepriory.org.uk.

NOW - I wonder how many of you realise that **2025 will be the thirtieth Anniversary** of the formation of the Friends of Ware Priory. This must surely be marked in some way. The committee has not considered it yet, but we shall!

I hope we will be able to contact some of the original members and/or councillors who were around at the time.

We have actually achieved a lot in the past 29 years – with probably around 100 projects under our belts – from small works such as providing peace roses planted around the British Legion Tommy in the Priory front garden near the flagpole to a second bridge across to the island. In financial terms these works amount to over £26,500 directly raised by us to over £43,000 where we have sought and received grants and donations for works – for example, grants from HCC, EHDC and from the Spears Trust which generously supported the bridge mentioned earlier.

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. Which, I might add, I do! 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 Chairperson that much easier.

Meeting closed 7.25pm