



# **THE WARE SOCIETY AGM 2023**

## **ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2022-2023**

### **Activities**

The relaxation of the Covid-19 restrictions this year allowed us to resume our meetings at the Priory. It was decided that in addition we would, where speakers were happy for us to do so, record meetings and then make them available via YouTube for members who could not attend in person. Unfortunately, this has not proved possible in every instance.

Since our last AGM we have had two summer visits. The first was to All Nations Christian College at Easneve. Our second was a tour of Ware led by our local historian Dr Alan Thomson. The new season of meetings began in September, our first to be held in the Priory since the Covid lockdown. Our speaker was Kate Thompson who gave an interesting talk on the Panshanger Archives. Following this our evening meetings have included presentations by Helen Gibson on the Maltings of Hertfordshire, Gary Mathews on Easton Lodge Gardens, John Wing on the Southern Malting, Dr Helen Fry on the work of Spy Master Thomas Kendrick and in March Sara Taylor on Alfred Russel Wallace the eminent naturalist and anthropologist who lived in Hertford.

In January committee members represented the Society at a community event. This was held in Southern Malting to showcase the work of Ware based voluntary organisations.

### **Planning**

We have continued to monitor planning applications and to comment where appropriate. We reported last year that we had held site meetings with the developer of the old Barclays Bank and Lloyds Bank buildings which are to be developed into residential accommodation with two retail units beneath and new builds to the rear. At the time we were encouraged that this developer was the one who made such a good job of the conversion of the Old Independent Chapel, now Godwin House. Unfortunately, they have now withdrawn from the project and we wait to see how this situation progresses.

We have also been in conversation with the developer of the old Victoria Pub in Star Street. We were able to allay some concerns over the proposed design detail of the proposed conversion of the pub which will return the building to its original purpose of residential accommodation. We have however raised objections to some aspects of the design and the proposed additional building of 3 dwellings to the rear which we felt would constitute overdevelopment. Despite our comments work has now started on site, pretty much in line with the original proposals.

Plans for the use of the old NatWest building have been through a number of iterations and are still in a state of flux. A recent application regarding installation of replacement doors and windows has been rejected.

The Society continues to be represented on the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. The plan has now been finalised and has been passed to East Herts Council. It is presently with an independent Examiner as part of the approval process.

A hybrid planning application has been submitted concerning the major development to the North and East of Ware. The application is primarily for permission to commence work on the spine road which will ultimately provide a link between the A10 and Widbury Hill. The Society has submitted detailed comments on the application particularly in respect of the proposed fragmented approach to construction of the road. At the last count the planning authority had received over 600 comments on the application so it will be some time before we can expect a decision. The Society will continue to keep a watching brief.

## **Projects**

We are extremely happy to report that after years of pressure by the Society, Thames Water have at last repaired the railings to the New River along London Road. The saga lasted some 5 years but our perseverance has paid dividends

We are sorry to have to report that we have not made similar progress on the development of "Gilpin's Field" at the entrance to the town as a community asset. With the support of Ware Town Council, we managed to move things forward to the extent that Thames Water funded a bio-diversity study. This was completed and a fairly comprehensive report provided. There was a period of limbo after the report was received and following further pressure from the Society, Thames Water have now said that for 'operational reasons' the development cannot go ahead. We will continue to pursue this issue, if nothing else our experience of working with Thames Water has taught us that perseverance pays dividends.

Following discussion with Network Homes work was carried out to remove encroaching ivy, undergrowth and shrubbery from the two gazebos to the rear of Burgage Court. We were promised that further refurbishment would be undertaken during 2022 but we still await some action despite having pursued the issue. However, there is better news, the two-level Gazebo and Watergate adjacent to Burgage Court has been restored and redecorated.

We are presently investigating the possibility of producing an information board on the story of May Savidge. If successful our intention is that the board should be located as close as possible to the original site of her house in Monkey Row, probably adjacent to the footpath at the Baldock Street roundabout.

As you may be aware the library is making arrangements to move from their existing location to a site in the centre of town. Over the years fortunately we have been allowed to store our archive material on the upper floor of the existing building. The move means that we have lost this facility and now need to find alternative accommodation.

## **People**

During the year we have noted with regret the deaths of members Terence Waters and Anne Aitken. Membership of the Society currently stands at 219, of whom about half are Life Members. Thank you to all our members for your continuing support of the Ware Society through the year.

To keep the Society lively and relevant, and running smoothly and efficiently into the future we will need more volunteers to take on formal roles on the Committee. Please consider if you can contribute in any way.