

Building The George

News of The George Community Pub

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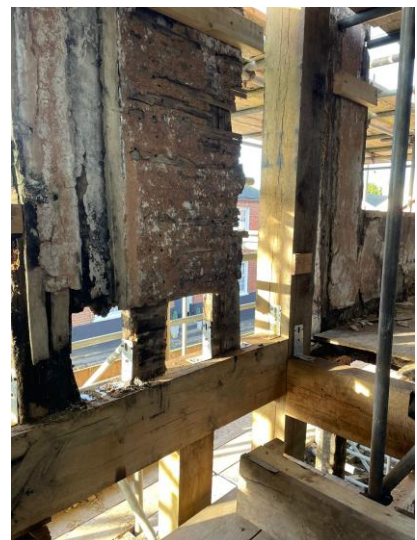
You will see some big changes at The George in the next few weeks as the site starts to look very different from the High Street view.

The rebuild powers ahead

After several weeks of painstaking work to reveal the detail of old and often rotting timber and structure the reconstruction of the oldest part of the building is now well underway. The contractor's brief, required by the terms of the Heritage Funding, is for the retention of as much as possible of the original structure. The George was not in a good state of repair when the fire happened in 2013 and the intervening ten years of weathering has led to multiple discoveries of timber and coverings that are too deteriorated to save. Despite that, much remains and the contractor, Seamans, have been inserting new timber where necessary to create a viable structure. The panels between the structural framework were originally 'wattle and daub' using wood that retained its natural shape and curves and some of these survived the fire and subsequent weathering.



Wattle and daub panels showing natural wood

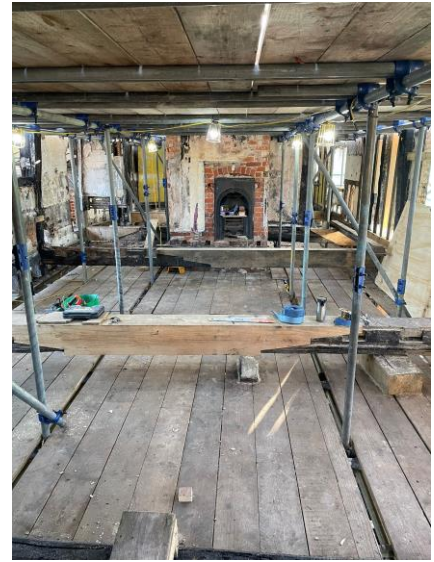


New structural oak beams on the upper floor

The roof structure is already going up and by Christmas may well be covered enabling the removal of the protective scaffolding.



Studwork wall mixing new and still structurally sound charred timbers



Looking across what will be the upstairs Activity Space to the fireplace in the main chimney

The roof of The George was destroyed in the fire and is being wholly replaced with new timberwork. This is faster work than the reconstructed sections of the building meaning visible progress will be seen in the coming weeks. The temporary roof will have served its purpose in giving some protection to the building since the fire but also in enabling construction work to continue in all but the worst weather. The removal of the temporary roof and the full revealing of the new roof will be a real 'phoenix rising from the ashes' moment for Wickham Market.



The George events

At the Christmas festive Market on 02 December there will be a team from The George to update you on the building progress and talk about plans for the pub and the community activity space. Come and try some pub games and enjoy some mulled wine, hot chocolate and beers.

Pub games and quiz night

Held in the Village Hall on Friday 29th September, over 70 people enjoyed an evening of competitive games and quizzing. Ten different pub games provided an entertaining evening from darts to bar skittles and the hall was a buzz of activity which ended in a testing quiz. Tickets included a free

hotdog and the bar was kept busy the whole evening. The first monthly 200 Club draw took place in the half time break for three lucky winners. Thanks to all those who attended and our volunteer helpers on the night; your generosity has added over £700 to our 'Gilding the Building' fund which will go towards putting back important elements that had to be taken out of our budget to meet our overall target.

The next pub games and quiz night will be on Friday 02 February 2024



The September and October 200 Club draws have given six lucky winners cash prizes and membership is still open for all those who would like to support this monthly fundraising draw. All proceeds will go towards our 'Gilding the Building' campaign, which includes the fitting of oak flooring within the pub and the resurfacing of the garden. To join the 200 Club go to www.wmgeorge.co.uk

Christine Abraham is The George's Community Education Coordinator and first employee

Christine was set on a career break after stepping back from her job as Chief Executive with Community Action Suffolk but the role of Community Engagement Coordinator for The George was too tempting for someone who has spent a lifetime in community service roles in Suffolk. Raised in Ipswich, Christine has settled in Framlingham after serving with Suffolk Police followed by a career in early years and childcare provision developing new out of school clubs. Christine then became funding manager for Suffolk ACRE distributing grants to good causes in Suffolk and then on to Young Suffolk, working with children and young people voluntary sector organisations. With the merger of ten voluntary sector organisations to form Community Action Suffolk in 2013, Christine was part of the senior management team and became Chief Exec of this £2.5 million turnover charity, until stepping back in September 2023.



More than a pub....is certainly the way in which I see The George operating to become a key part of Wickham Market's social fabric

The community element of the George project is the more difficult side to explain not least because it is unique. There are nearly 200 community pubs in the country but none, as far as we know, that has the space and people devoted to community that The George project gives.

Christine is very aware of the need to reach out into the whole community to achieve diversity in the way in which The George is governed, supported and patronised. *"There is a lot of work to do understand how The George will complement existing social provision in Wickham Market – the Village Hall, the Resource Centre and elsewhere. It's not the traditional pub aspects of The George that push all the right buttons for me but what is going to happen upstairs with a meeting place for parents with young children or older people for example. It's about meeting the challenges that local people are facing especially with the current cost of living crisis. More than a Pub is the strapline of the Plunkett Foundation who support community projects of various sorts and it is certainly the way in which I see The George operating to become a key part of Wickham Market's social fabric."*

One of Christine's early ideas is setting up a 'Meet up Mondays' facility at The George where local people can come together to socialise and engage. Around 100 such groups already exist in Suffolk.

'Social' impact is the added value brought to the local community/society which improves community cohesion, reduces isolation and supports individuals to be more resilient and active members of that community. It includes increasing 'soft' skills for individuals, (for example, improved self-esteem/confidence) and social skills (for example, improving friendship groups/support networks). - The George Social Impact Projection Report June 2017

If you have thoughts or ideas to contribute to the development of the social aspects of The George project Christine can be contacted at cec@thegeorgecommunitypub.co.uk

The George: a slice of history by Dr Tony Stroker

The first written evidence of The George serving the community came in 1652

The George had been standing on the site for 500 years-half a millennium!

follow The George at @thegeorgewm on Instagram or Facebook for restoration updates and news of events

Building The George newsletter is written and distributed by The George Community Pub (Wickham Market) Ltd which is a registered society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 FCA Mutuals Public Register No. 7462



The George is a very, very old pub; it has been standing quietly on its site in Wickham Market for hundreds of years, but no-one realised just how very old until it was nearly destroyed by the devastating fire that ripped through the building on the 18th April 2013. Until then, it had generally been assumed that the pub had been around since the 17thc. The first written evidence of The George as a working inn serving the community, and indeed the nation, came during the 'Commonwealth', when Oliver Cromwell, as Lord Protector, governed the country as a republic following the execution of King Charles I in 1649. In 1652, Churchwardens at Wickham Market recorded the expense of providing one night's accommodation at The George for 'nine soldiers at four pence a man'. Others of this contingent of Cromwell's 'New Model Army' were hosted at The White Hart; The Crown and the Blue Boar with the villagers themselves meeting the cost of this billeting. It is very likely that the soldiers were en route to fight in the First Anglo-Dutch War, which officially began with a declaration of war in July 1652, but had actually been rumbling on for several months. This war (1652-4) was fought entirely at sea; it brought to a head a conflict between The Commonwealth of England and the United Provinces of the Netherlands over trade and other political issues. Both sides strove determinedly for naval dominance over crucial trade routes in the North Sea, the English Channel and beyond. After some initial setbacks, greater strength and better tactics prevailed and the Commonwealth Navy was able to claim a decisive victory at the Battle of Scheveningen in 1653, which ultimately led to a peace deal being sealed in the 'Treaty of Westminster' of 1654.

It is piquant to imagine, through this slice of history, The George playing a supporting role, however incidental, in the history of England. The written evidence supplied by the Churchwardens seeming to confirm the provenance of The George as a typical 17thc wayside inn. Ominously, after the catastrophic fire in 2013, that centuries long story of service to the community seemed to be approaching a fatal final chapter when a property developer purchased the site and quickly submitted plans to demolish The George. This was a heavy blow: it looked like all was lost and Wickham Market's last pub would soon be no more.

However, in a dramatic and unexpected twist, forensic examination by archaeological experts of remaining timbers showed that the fire had burnt away centuries old grime which revealed the startling news that the timbers were not from the 17th C at all. They had actually been erected in the early Tudor period, during the reigns either of Henry VII (1485 -1509) or his illustrious, (and infamous), son Henry VIII (1509-1547). This meant that The George was much older than originally thought and had been standing on the site for 500 years – half a millennium! Permission to demolish denied! This unforeseen revelation added extra zest to the Wickham Market villagers' fight to 'Save The George'; a long, hard-fought campaign to rescue the last pub in Wickham Market, reconstruct it, renew it and re-locate it at the heart of village life. That campaign is now bearing fruit in the current building work, visible for all to see, which is scheduled to be completed in late 2024. With crucial support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund; the Community Ownership Fund; the shareholders and a host of other funders and well-wishers, The George will continue making history long into the future, even as it has done so remarkably and so prodigiously over the past five hundred years.

I am writing a book on the history of The George which will be published when the pub re-opens next year. I would very much like to hear from anyone who has a connection to The George or has any memories or photographs of the pub that they feel might be worth contributing to the book. Please do get in touch: my email address is tony.stroker@gmail.com