

# The Great Bed of Ware Heritage Trail

A walk through time visiting the places that housed the Great Bed between 1590 and 1869.

The Trail takes no more than an hour and passes many opportunities for refreshment so stay awhile.



Take time to visit Tudor Square where many of the buildings date from the 1500's. Jacoby's restaurant is a fine example of a jettied, timber-framed building which was once an inn.

Nearby is the site of the Free Grammar School, which existed before the Reformation of religion. During the Reformation, all monasteries and convents were closed down and pilgrimages to shrines and holy places were banned. This badly affected trade in Ware. Large numbers of pilgrims going to the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham used to stay in the inns of Ware.



Place House stands in a small walled courtyard in the centre of Ware and is a building of grade I national historic and architectural importance.

As the former manor house of Ware, the oldest part of the building is thought to date to the late 13th or early 14th century when the manor was held by Thomas Wake, the Second Lord of Lydell (b.1297 - d.1349).

Today the building is owned by the Hertfordshire Building Preservation Trust who became its owners in 1975 and oversaw its restoration in 1977-8.



The Great Bed of Ware Heritage Trail features plaques on six sites in Ware High Street, which were associated with the Great Bed. The Ware Museum thanks the owners and occupiers of those buildings for giving permission for the plaques.

The Ware Museum is especially grateful to the following bodies and organisations for their generous financial support without which the Heritage Trail would not have been possible.

- Stansted Community Fund
- East Herts Archaeological Society
- East Herts District Council
- The Ware Society

**Stansted Community Fund**  
Part of BAA Communities Trust



The Heritage Trail has been designed and organised for Ware Museum by Lis Barratt, David Perman and Jan Wing.



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## Opening Times from May 6th 2013

Tuesday, Wednesday,  
& Saturday 11:00 - 4:00

Sunday 2:00 - 4:00  
Bank Holiday Mondays

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## Ware Town Centre

### C1590 - 1692

This was one of the oldest inns in Ware – named the ‘White Hart’ after the badge of Joan, ‘the Fair Maid of Kent’ who was lady of the manor of Ware and the mother of King Richard II.

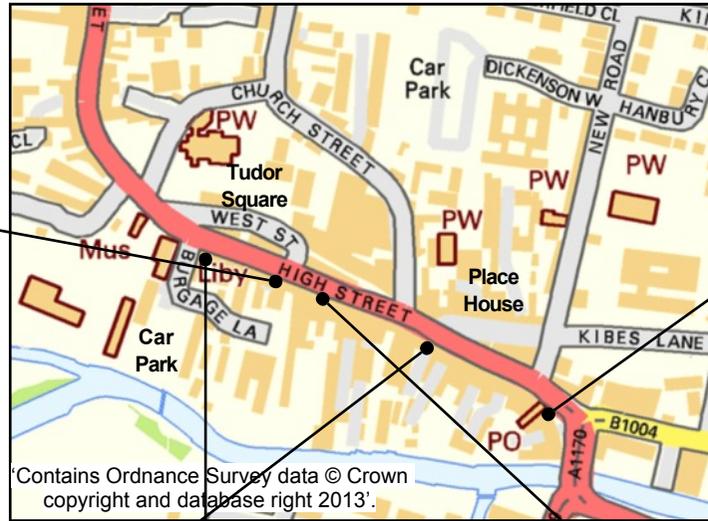


The White Hart Inn  
(HSBC)

This is the inn where the Great Bed was first recorded.

In 1596, a German prince, Ludwig of Anhalt-Köthen wrote about a bed “so wide, four couples might cosily lie side by side.”

Experts believe the bed was designed as an advertising gimmick – to attract visitors to the inns which had suffered from the loss of the pilgrimage trade. And it worked.



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### C1825 - 1869



The Saracen's Head

The last inn where the Great Bed resided in Ware was the original Saracen's Head Inn, opposite the bottom of New Road. That was demolished in 1957 and the replacement Saracen's Head was built overlooking the river.

Daniel Brown, landlord of the Saracen's Head acquired the bed in 1848. But the bed was

too big to fit into the bedrooms there and had to be cut down in height.

When Daniel Brown died, the freeholders forced his widow to pay for all outstanding repairs. To do so, she had to put up the Great Bed for sale. It was thought that Charles Dickens had bought it, but in fact the bed had been sold in 1870 to Henry Theale who ran a showground at Rye House. It stayed there until 1931, when it was acquired by the V & A Museum.

### C1700 - 1765

The Crown was one of the biggest inns in Ware and stood here until it was demolished in 1765. A fine house for a maltster was then built on the site – it's now Ware Library.



The Crown Inn  
(Ware Library)

It was while the Great Bed was here that it got a reputation for having a great many people sleeping in it at the same time.

There is a story that six Citizens of London came with their wives and, after feasting on a big supper, slept in the bed some with their heads at the top, some with heads at the foot – in such a way that no one was lying next to someone they were not married to.

Later it was said that twelve butchers and their wives slept in the bed. And later still, a whole troop of cavalry were said to have slept in the bed.

### C1692 - 1700

The George Inn was a long and low building running from what is now Lloyds TSB to George Yard.



The George Inn  
(Hairizon)

It was while the Great Bed was here that the “ceremony of the horns” took place. When a guest indicated that he wanted to sleep in the Great Bed, the landlord would assemble an ostler (stable boy) and a chambermaid and lead the procession upstairs behind a pair of deer antlers. As they went upstairs, the landlord would recite a poem. It was all meant to be a joke about ‘cuckolding’.

The whole ceremony was, of course, a way of getting a guest to part with even more money.

### C1765 - 1825

It was while the bed was in the Bull Inn that it gained the reputation for being haunted.



The Bull Inn  
(Saffron BS)

In 1839 a pantomime was put on in London, featuring the Great Bed. In the programme, it said that the bed was made by Jonas Fosbrooke, a journeyman carpenter, for the use of the Royal Family but over the years it had become

neglected and was used only when there were large wedding parties in Ware. This upset the ghost of Jonas Fosbrooke so that any commoners who slept in the bed were “subject to all kinds of pinching, nipping and scratching”. People were therefore afraid to sleep in the Great Bed.

One man slept there for a bet but came down the next morning, bruised from head to foot.