



## News and events

- Several members attended a recent Arc & Arc talk in St Albans given by the man who, it is hoped, will make a replica of the **7<sup>th</sup> century ewer** found in Wheathampstead in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and now in the British Museum. We will send members more information about fund-raising to pay for this in the near future.
- **Next meeting:** On **Wednesday 16 November** Ruth Jeavons will share some of her experience of learning about the history of Wheathampstead from talking with former neighbours in Necton Road whose **Recollections of Wheathampstead** went back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## The crinkle-crankle walls



Visitors to Wheathampstead are frequently intrigued by the crinkle-crankle walls in our village, now pleasantly enhanced by the attractive community garden. These crinkle-crankle or serpentine walls are unusual but not unique and their origin dates back thousands of years.

In April 2021, Egypt announced one of the most important discoveries since the excavation of King Tutankhamun's tomb in the Valley of the Kings almost 100 years ago. A 'lost golden city', 3,400 years old and known as Aten, was found in the southern province of Luxor near some of the country's most famous monuments. Serpentine walls feature in a number of Egyptian cities but were used extensively in the architecture of Aten. As a minor part of a larger system of fortification, they may have been used to force oncoming enemy troops to break ranks, making them vulnerable to those defending the city.

In England the first serpentine walls appeared in East Anglia in the seventeenth century, when Dutch engineers were draining the marshes of the Fens and brick-based architecture was becoming fashionable. These walls were particularly well suited to exposed weather conditions or soggy,

wet and unstable ground. In Wheathampstead, the Old Rectory in King Edward Place was originally surrounded by a moat sourced from the River Lea. The area of Glebe land around the Old Rectory was wet and marshy and this may be why the serpentine design was chosen for the walls of the Old Rectory garden.



A 'crinkle-crankle wall', first named in the eighteenth century, is longer than a straight wall covering the same stretch of land but in construction uses fewer bricks. This is because a crinkle-crankle wall gains all the support it needs from its sinuous shape, while a straight wall needs to be strengthened by a wide footing or regular buttresses.

Most English crinkle-crankle walls are in Suffolk, which claims at least 50 examples, twice as many as in the whole of the rest of the country. Many were built to run from east to west so that the alcoves on one side faced south, providing a wind break, catching the sun and making the cultivation of fragile and exotic fruits such as apricots, peaches and grapes possible. The walls in Wheathampstead run north to south so do not attract as much sun but, as our crinkle-crankle walls are the only publicly accessible example in Hertfordshire, they should continue to attract and intrigue visitors.

Dianne Payne