

Ruthin Town and Around O Gwmpas y Dre



Local news, comment and features, published quarterly by Ruthin and District Civic Association, Cymdeithas Ddinesig Rhuthun a'r Cylch

December 2014

Christmas in Ruthin

Ruth Bacon looks forward a great variety of Christmas Celebrations.



Christmas shopping can be both a pleasure and a headache. If you like the hustle and bustle of crowds, such places as the Rows in Chester or the malls of Liverpool or Manchester will appeal to you. Tasteful or, depending on your viewpoint, tacky lights, seasonal decorations and Christmas themed music bombard your senses both in the shops and outside. The huge choice of things to buy may bemuse you but on the plus side it can also allow you to track down that elusive gift for difficult Auntie Flo! A combination of stamina, purpose and cheerfulness seems to be the secret of surviving.

Alternatively if you want to shop in a quieter and less crowded environment, still want lots of choice and do not want to travel miles, Ruthin should be the place for you. Gifts of all types for all ages and sexes can be found. From jewellery to toys, chocolates to ties, foodstuffs to books, expensive to affordable, Ruthin has the lot! The shops and the Craft Centre have a variety of gifts to suit all but the most awkward of friends and relatives. The town's markets, both in the Town Hall and Friday's Country market in the Presbyterian Church hall offer a range of goodies including delicious things to eat!

At the time of writing, the Christmas lights have been hung in place ready to be turned on by the Mayor Steve Beach on November 29th at a big Christmas event in the town organised by Shelly Barratt, Ruthin town and area community co-ordinator. All the local community groups are involved and it promises to be a fun day with plays and carols, as well as plenty of stalls selling hand-

crafted gifts. Santa's Grotto will be in St Peter's Church at its Christmas Fair which will be taking place on the same day. Parking in town will be free for the day.

Christmas events to raise funds for charity are ever popular. Several villages around Ruthin held Festive fairs in November such as the Food Fair and Fireworks in Pwllglas on the 22nd November organised by Ruthin Forward,

On Saturday 6th December in Ruthin Library at a coffee morning to raise funds for Alzheimer's, decorations will be on sale and hand-made wreaths can be ordered.

Over the weekend 12th-14th December an event called Entertaining Angels will take place at St Peter's Church. Described as the Christmas version of the summer scarecrow competition entrants are asked to design and set up in the church - an angel! A Light a Life service to raise funds for Nightingale House Hospice will take place at 6pm on the 12th, details to be announced nearer the day. On Saturday 13th the exhibition will be open to the public who can vote for "The people's favourite angel". A singing competition for children, Angel Voices is at 6pm. The exhibition will be open again on Sunday 14th and at 5pm there will be a sing-along-service with the presentation of awards and the winning Angel Voice singer will be announced. All monies raised will go to Ruthin Town Parishes and the Mayor's Charities. Full details of the weekend can be found by Googling Entertaining Angels.

There will be carols at Ruthin Hospital at 7pm on December 16th and for the adventurous a torch lit walk to St Meugan's Church for carols and mulled wine departs at 6.30pm from The Green, Bryn Rhydd.

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From December 1st the Garment Spa on Lon Parcwyr is collecting chocolates which it will share between the elderly in Awelon and Ruthin Food Bank children just before Christmas. Donations can be dropped at the shop.

Finally the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols takes place at St Peter's at 5pm on the 21st. and the popular Christingle service is on Christmas Eve at 5pm.

Unfortunately there is not enough space to list all Ruthin's Christmas "happenings" here but it is a certainty that the town will be decorated and looking at its most festive and welcoming for all of them.



It has been a slow and painful progress but, perhaps there is light at the end of the tunnel Miles Anderson reviews the progress in reopening the Cuning Green

We have had a series of email exchanges with Denbighshire on the current situation regarding the dangerous condition of Ruthin Castle's wall that has caused the path's closure. Their latest message is that the sections of the wall along the Cuning Green in question are in the ownership of the same person and so will be dealt with together in as far as any official notices are concerned. The further section which is a possible source for a future problem is part of the scheduled monument that has been identified as being in need of investigation to determine the condition, however, if the other sections were to be repaired this section's issues, based on current knowledge, would not stop the path being opened. This latter section of wall falls under Cadw's jurisdiction and it is likely, if they consider the wall requires substantial repairs, a further closure of the Cuning Green may be necessary to facilitate the works as the path is so narrow at that point. Action has already been taken on two sections of wall that were not listed and unsafe belonging to the Ruthin Castle Hotel by the Mill Pond that were required to be made safe to avoid an extension of the path closure towards Cae Ddol.

Following the recent hand delivery of correspondence from DCC to the owner of the property, if no satisfactory response is received, then a notice under S215 of the Town and Country Planning Act is scheduled to be issued. As a listed building the wall has to be reinstated following this action and such work would then come under the direction of the Planning Department.

It would seem that now Denbighshire have instigated the process, some action, one way or another, will take place. It may still be some time until our path is reopened, but it appears that, sooner or later we will have our Cuning Green back – hopefully before the 2015 tourist season starts. We had hoped to have it back for last year's summer visitors and were disappointed, let's hope that we are not disappointed yet again.



As the Centenary Year of the start of WW1 draws to a close, Gwynne Morris reviews Ruthin's War Memorials



The tragic loss of lives suffered by the many of the young men of Ruthin in wars and conflicts since 1914 have been duly commemorated within the town, the main one being the War Memorial in Wynnstey road.

However agreeing as to the most suitable form of remembrance after the first World War was not easy and it was not until 5th December 1925 that the column was unveiled by the then Lord Lieutenant of the County, Lord Kenyon. Over the years since 1918 several ideas had been put forward, ranging from re-decorating and heating of the town hall, building a new and larger town hall, laying out an ornamental garden with tennis and croquet courts and a swimming pool.

On 10th March 1921 the congregation of St. Peter's Church unveiled their memorial.

This spurred the public to petition the Town Council, under their Mayor Alderman W. Godfrey Lecomber to act.

Even so no more public meetings were held to discuss the matter until a year later. One proposal was to erect a column on the Square. This idea was turned down on the grounds that it would be dwarfed by the Joseph Peers clock and the spire of St. Peter's and also that the situation was not suitable because of the Markets and Fairs.

By May 1923 the Governors and Friends of Ruthin School had erected a new Sports Pavilion in memory of the loss of 37 old boys, among them Lieut Philip Hebdon Lecomber son, who incidentally had been recommended for the Victoria Cross. Above the frontage of the building facing the school's playing field is the caption "1914 To the Memory of those old boys of Ruthin School who died during the Great War in the Service of the King. 1918". A board commemorating is also on display inside the school buildings.



After much more discussion it was finally resolved to ask the Bangor Diocesan architect to prepare plans for a monument. The land in New Street, Wynnstey Road was purchased and tenders for its erection invited. It is interesting to note that the column is fourteen foot high in Aberdeen Grey Granite supplied by Messers Garden & Co from the Victoria Granite Works in Aberdeen. (This fact is reported in an edition of the Denbigh Free Press of the time).

How many of our readers have given the column a second look? It will be well worth their while to do so. The granite head contains an equal armed cross and in the intervening space a full triquera knot. Just below it on the column St. Michael representing the triumph of good over evil, with a slain dragon at his feet. Beneath this the ancient sword of Trehandel and Guillons.

On the shaft of the cross are the words "To the Glory of God and in the memory of the men of this Borough who lost their lives in the Great War, 1914-1918". On the south side is another inscription "Dros ryddid collasant eu gwaed." (They gave their blood for freedom



BLOT ON THE LANDSCAPE

Derek Jones finds there is still work still to be done

OK, it's not exactly on the beaten track of the Ruthin and District Civic Association. It is, however, just in Denbighshire – on its boundary with Wrexham – and, without inside knowledge, the average passer-by, might think it has been forgotten by both authorities, as well as by national bodies responsible for the quality and conservation of landscape.

If you are a regular traveller across the Llandegla Moors you may have guessed by now that I'm referring to the collection of old and rusting vehicles – lorries, cars, trucks and what not – which litter the moor on the right hand side going east. Some of the metal is green with undergrowth and moss, all of it is dusty. It is, without any question, a blot on the landscape.

The Civic Association has been concerned about the state of this site for at least a decade, raising the matter on several occasions with Denbighshire County Council, who obviously share our concerns.

It might seem as if nothing has changed. Actually quite a lot has, though not enough to make an impact on a casual passer-by. First, a whole lot of 2CV cars were removed. Then, during the past two years, some of the trees which screened the worst of the eyesore were cut down. Hopes were raised – but were quickly dashed.

Most of the vehicles have remained in situ. In fact, the removal of the trees has merely drawn more attention to the mess that remains. It appears that the owner of the site objected to the council's actions, and has lodged a complaint with the Ombudsman. There, for the moment, the matter rests.

Long term, there is better news. Once the legal tangles have been sorted out, and the vehicles removed, Natural Resources Wales (formerly The Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission, intend to restock the whole site with native broadleaf trees. Of course, the mills of the law and bureaucracy grind slow, but there is, we understand, every prospect that the new tress will be in place by 2016.



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The History of Ruthin

Miles Anderson has nothing but praise for this attractive volume

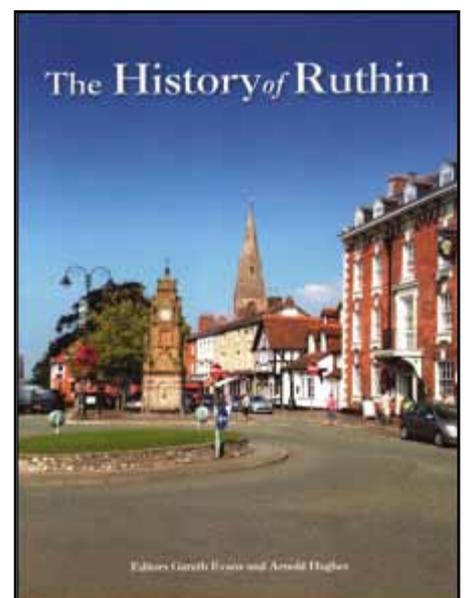
At last the long awaited definitive history of Ruthin has arrived! But surely no history can ever be definitive, not even this one? Possibly not, but having four separate authors for this most attractive volume, it comes as close to being definitive as possible, each writer bringing a distinctive approach to history telling!

Our four authors, Roger Edwards, Gareth Evans, Arnold Hughes and Gwynne Morris, all historians and each steeped in the culture of the locality as well as that of our nation – theirs by birth, mine by adoption. From the start this history identifies Ruthin securely, as it should be, as a Welsh town. You will have to await a full review until the next edition of Town and Around, but at this stage we are full of praise for the quality of production, the excellent illustrations, maps and diagrams, and it is good to have a clear and distinctive Welsh translation.

The Official launch at the County Archives on Tuesday 25th November was a very well



attended event. By now stocks of this fine volume, which thanks to Cadwyn Clwyd's support is attractively priced at £9.99, are available from Janet's Eagle book shop and Elfair. If you are considering presents for Christmas, what better than to give a copy of The History of Ruthin / Hanes Rhuthun?



In praise of Ruthin's shopkeepers

Miles Anderson finds much to enjoy on our high streets



Most similar sized market towns to Ruthin have one high street. Our town however is blessed with two – Clwyd Street, not to forget Upper Clwyd Street, and Well Street – both of which are liberally flanked with varied and interesting shops. And there are other shops scattered around the centre.

Our shopping culture is changed from that of previous generations and large supermarkets are a fact of life, and for most people living those very busy lives, that are norm in today's 21st Century, they answer a pressing need.

But, unlike so many other high streets where, rather than selling goods across the counter, most retail establishments are selling services, such as hairdressing, beauty treatments, cashing cheques, tanning and tattoo parlours and agencies of all kinds, estate, financial and legal, ours are still mainly occupied by individual shops – at the last count there were over sixty!. Of course we also need those services and agencies, but in proportion.

And in all those shops there are shopkeepers behind the counters willing to give personal service and advice that you will rarely find in a supermarket.

Ruthin and District Civic Association are rightly proud of its publication, Slow walks round Ruthin. To appreciate a tour of our town you are advised that you should take it slowly. Similarly, to fully appreciate shopping in Ruthin, you need to take your time. Park your car – we are blessed with more parking spaces per head of population here than most similar towns – and get out and walk. On our high streets as well as men's and women's outfitters we have butchers, bookshops, stationers, newsagents, haberdashers, a health food specialist, delicatessen, sellers of toys, art materials, sweets, antiques...and so the list goes on and on!

And when you are tired of shopping, what a great selection of cafes there are to revive you. In each of Ruthin's shops there is always a shopkeeper and without whom our high streets – both of them – would die. We should celebrate our shopkeepers!



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Cost cutting of Denbighshire's Archive facilities

A member of the team is most concerned at the losses

Access to information will be reduced from 4 to 2 days a week by written appointment and a statement of which documents you will be needing----if you know!

After a meeting with Alan Smith, we, the volunteer group at the archives, have been told that all the cuts are already decided. Basically we will be losing Jane, the chief archivist whose position has been axed. A great loss.

Access to information will be reduced from 4 to 2 days a week by written appointment and a statement of which documents you will be needing----if you know! Most people need guidance. There will probably be a payment.

Meanwhile, staff left—1 archivist and 2 or 3 part-time staff are also to continue work on placing all documents on line: an on-going task which they estimate will take many years to complete. Large maps, for instance, would need new expensive equipment to be able to produce reduced photo copies for the web.

Many estate collections and maps could be returned to families to look after themselves, thereby making them inaccessible to the public and without the facilities to care for them in a controlled environment.



‘EVERY LITTLE HELPS’

- OR DOES IT? DEREK JONES RAISES SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LATEST ROUND OF PROPOSED CUTS TO DENBIGHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES

Like every other local authority in Wales, Denbighshire has to make further cuts, over the next two years, to the services it provides. They have to find a further £17m in order to balance their books.

I name them ‘their’ books, but of course I really should have written ‘ours’. As good democrats the County Council want to hear our reactions to their proposals; as good democrats in turn, civic societies (in Denbigh and Llangollen as well as Ruthin) need to make considered responses in areas of particular concern to them. Here is a contribution to their thinking.

£17m is big money. I’m immediately struck, therefore, that one of the proposals on the table is that the Council should reduce, or even cease, paying their annual grant of £30,000 to the Ruthin Craft Centre. That is very small money by comparison. Can it really be justified except on the perhaps spurious principle that every community service must be made to chip in? Tesco is of course the Centre’s next door neighbour, but that does not mean that Denbighshire should, in effect, adopt its slogan ‘every little helps’. £30,000 hardly scratches the surface of the county’s problem.

The Council’s reason that the Craft Centre could be withdrawn because the Arts Council of Wales already contributes heavily to the Centre. Certainly the Centre’s work as an exhibition and educational centre is of national, indeed international, significance; it attracts some of the biggest names in the Crafts world. But that should not mean that its local significance should be threatened by cuts. Surely its home county would want to continue its association with such a prestigious institution, by contributing, however meagrely, to its continuing excellence.

If £30,000 is peanuts, the suggested cut of £302,000 to the Library service at Denbigh, Llangollen, Rhyl and Ruthin is nothing short of draconian. During the last ten years visits to libraries in Wales as a whole have risen by 11%. How can Denbighshire even think of spending less on books, as essential to human happiness and well-being as any service whose benefits are more easily quantifiable? Councillors and officers surely want to see a well-informed and articulate electorate; well-stocked libraries are essential contributors to that end.

In particular, the Council suggest that art exhibitions should no longer be held in the Libraries. This seems at odds with their proposal to develop these well-loved institutions as ‘community hubs’, by which I suppose they mean that libraries should double up as meeting places, information centres and so forth. Arts exhibitions are not incompatible with such aspirations. It seems here as if the council needs to do some joined-up thinking.

From the sublime to something much more mundane – there might be a cut in street cleaning of the order of £105,000. What might this mean? At its worst, litter would be allowed to accumulate, and litter bins left to overflow. Have the council considered the potential effects on tourism, let alone on public health? Ruthin, Denbigh and Llangollen are fine historic towns, and even Rhyl, often disparaged, has its charm as a certain kind of seaside resort. They could easily lose their sheen.

This brings us finally to an issue which is very close to the heart of civic societies. Nothing appears in the documents, but there are rumours circulating about the possible closure of the county conservation department. Surely not – it would, without doubt, be cutting off our noses in order to spite our faces, affecting the very nature and identity of our towns and villages. Come along Denbighshire, reassure us that this is not true!



As good democrats the County Council want to hear our reactions to their proposals

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Quayle Award for 2014

Every year the Ruthin and District Civic Association ask for nominations for the Quayle Award for projects that have been completed in the last twelve months. It is important that, whether it is for a new building, a restoration or a development of the landscape, the nominations should be for something that is of quite exceptional quality. The original criteria, set out when this award was first proposed to honour the late Professor William Quayle, are that it should be sympathetic to and improve the quality and character of the area, use local materials, as far as possible, as well as enriching and enhancing the life of Ruthin. Our area of consideration should cover, as well as the town itself, those villages that make up Ruthin’s hinterland. Please let us have nominations so that, if there are suitable candidates, a short list can be considered by the end of January. Nominations to the secretary, Miles Anderson, Silver Birches, Llanfair D.C., Ruthin, LL15 2SD or miles-and-jill@freeuk.com

Ruthin Archives moving to the digital age!

Bobby Feeley puts Denbighshire's case for cuts



the proposals are aimed at modernising and providing the Service with a new direction to help widen access to the County's history, whilst also reflecting the Councils need for efficiencies.

Ultimately we are trying to manage severe resource restraints, whilst striving to ensure the Archives have a sustainable future

You will have seen recent press reports on changes to the Ruthin Archives Service, some of which have been quite misleading and negative. I have been speaking with the Denbighshire officer responsible for these proposals and would like to explain the situation to date.

You must by now be aware Denbighshire Council, along with the rest of Wales, have been dealing with stringent budgetary cuts for several years now, and in the next two years a further £17m has to be found. As a result every area of service is being scrutinised to see where savings can be made, by and large we are trying to reorganise, improve and enhance, rather than just 'stop doing' altogether.

This is the case at Ruthin Archives, where the proposals are aimed at modernising and providing the Service with a new direction to help widen access to the County's history, whilst also reflecting the Councils need for efficiencies.

Currently the County's Archive materials are limited to the Ruthin Office. The proposal to reduce the opening times from 4 days to 2.5 days will enable the team to allocate valuable time to focus on digitising items and publish on line, thereby giving access to our records all round the world. These reduced hours will also allow the team to work on priority areas such as cataloguing, indexing and digital preservation. At present the Archives are accessed freely but in relatively few numbers.

By far the majority of responses received via the questionnaire are supportive of this new long term vision and many of those who replied came up with helpful suggestions as to how this ambitious project can be achieved. eg the idea of working with commercial partners, greater training for volunteers and focussing digitalisation on particular areas etc.

Further proposals will involve a team restructure which will fund the outsourcing of semi-permanent records stored at Lon Parcwr, allowing the vacated premises to generate income by way of rent or sale and the record management team will move to the Archives thereby increasing capacity.

The Archive changes have the helpful support and advice of both Cymal and the National Archives Service who are helping to ensure the service creates the capacity for change, whilst maintaining a reasonable level of open access. Tweaking the current arrangements is just not sufficient to make the radical change needed.

The consultation process so far has highlighted several areas which need revisiting so we intend to press ahead with the necessary steps for change, hold back on those things that need more details and work closely with staff and other stakeholders, within and outside the Council to further improve the proposed new service.

Ultimately we are trying to manage severe resource restraints, whilst striving to ensure the Archives have a sustainable future, the proposals are aimed at tackling the problems of digitalisation and public access, currently taxing other services across Wales. We are optimistic this will be a viable way forward and hopefully at the end of the process we will have an improved service with global access, which could be a model for other councils in Wales. NB we are currently live on website for further consultation.

Ruthin Rovers and the local football stars of the future

Alun Jones finds Ruthin youngsters are no 'couch potatoes'

Ruthin has for many, many years had successful football teams playing at a high standard. The local football stars of the future are getting their first taste of football with Ruthin Rovers.

The Rovers held their first training session in the Autumn of 2003, starting with children from the Ruthin area who were in Year 1. Every year since then the Rovers have taken a new set of youngsters in to the under 7s team to enjoy training and start playing matches.

In 2005 the first Ruthin Rovers teams joined the Wrexham and District League and experienced games on a Sunday morning every other weekend. Since then the Rovers mini-football teams have gone from strength to strength with a team at every age between under 7s and under 11s. This year the club has nearly 120 children registered.

Several of the Rovers teams have been very lucky to play at Wrexham's Racecourse ground over the years, winning the Sportsmanship Awards for the various age groups on many occasions.

Once they finish with the under 11s team the youngsters then move up to Ruthin Youth, and then progress to the senior Ruthin teams.

The playing facilities have improved dramatically since 2005, with new pitches now available at the Llanfwrog Community Centre. It really is great to see two or three different teams playing on a Saturday or Sunday morning, being cheered on by the parents and families. You will also see convoys of cars leaving Ruthin on weekend mornings travelling to the various villages in the Wrexham area for away games.

This year's under 7s are managed by Alun Jones and Dave Threlfall. We are very lucky to have Chris Hughes to take the majority of the training sessions. Chris is manager of Newtown in the Welsh Premier League. It's great to see him being able to pass his obvious football knowledge to the under 7s, who listen intently to his sessions (most of the time!!).

The under 7s have 28 children signed on and the majority of them turn up to every training session and every game, come rain or shine. Once again, the training facilities during the winter have improved with the new astroturf pitch at Ruthin Leisure Centre offering a great surface to practice skills on.

The Rovers try to ensure that everybody gets an equal opportunity at an early age to be part of the team. As the games are only 4 a side at under 7, there are a lot of opportunities to swap players and try different options. We have seen all of the youngsters improve week on week. The team also provides them with an opportunity to get to know children of the same age in different schools in the area, which is great to see.

The Rovers would like to thank everybody who voluntarily give up their time to do the training and other aspects of running the club. We would also like to thank all of the parents and various sponsors for their continued support.



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LOCAL HISTORIAN CRITICISES CUTS TO ARCHIVES SERVICE

Gareth Evans regrets loss of an important service

The latest news of a possible closure of the much respected building conservation service suggests Denbighshire has lost all care and concern for its heritage

The wanton destruction of the Ruthin workhouse records by the staff of the last Denbighshire, who had no idea what they were doing and cared even less, could now be about to happen on a larger scale with disastrous consequences

They need staff with the qualifications, experience and guts to protect important information.

The recent news that the archives service in Denbighshire is to be substantially reduced has deeply disillusioned the local history community. The news has slipped out in an underhanded way and even now some two months later there is no firm proposal in the public domain leading most historians to believe that Council managers are making things up as they go along. The latest news of a possible closure of the much respected building conservation service suggests Denbighshire has lost all care and concern for its heritage in its desperate search for cuts. The developments at the archives service suggests they will target services held in regard by the community and protect shadowy sectors of the central bureaucracy. The archives forms part of a business improvement and modernisation unit and the entire cuts required of this shadowy and mysterious unit have been dumped on the archives – a rather unsavoury case of bureaucratic bullying.



We need to ask questions and express concerns because local authorities in this area have frequently destroyed

our heritage when faced with cuts or difficult choices. The demolition of the Ship on Well Street, the vandalism which destroyed the elegant Edwardian interior of the county offices and the Pont Howkyn 'improvements' are all examples of avoidable catastrophes. The wanton destruction of the Ruthin workhouse records by the staff of the last Denbighshire, who had no idea what they were doing and cared even less, could now be about to happen on a larger scale with disastrous consequences for all of us who have families and roots here and want to find out more about them.

As a sop to quieten concerns the Council has offered to digitalise the archival records but has given no information on how this colossal task could be undertaken nor where the huge sums that will be needed will come from. This should be left until after the forthcoming reorganisation. It will take over 25 years and Denbighshire has probably less than 25 months left. It would be best to leave a long term and expensive but useful new project to an organisation which has the time to manage it and let's hope the new council will care more about the rich heritage of our county than the present one.

It seems to me that there are three issues here.

- First access to the historical records by the public. Currently the archives is open for 4 days and the proposal seems to be in future to open for 2 days - a cut of 50% when the required level of cuts across the Council is much less. Someone in the Council really dislikes the archives service.
- Second, old documents need conservation and care. The present proposals involve the transfer of staff from these duties to help sort out an allegedly enormous backlog of work in the modern record store. A 'robust destruction policy' will be pursued apparently to allow the Council to negotiate a major property deal, disposing of the county record store, which will see its presence in Ruthin diminish. This shambolic approach to the archives places at risk documents going back to the twelfth century. They are important: they reveal the mistakes and good judgements of our ancestors and explain why we live in our present built and natural environment. The newly published History of Ruthin could not have been written without the archives. Once they've gone they're gone forever.
- Third, archives need professional staff. They need staff with the qualifications, experience and guts to protect important information. The present archives head is retiring and will not be replaced so the archives will be at the mercy of the business improvers and modernisers. It is rather like making the leader of North Korea responsible for democratic governance and the consequences are all too predictable.

As this is written the Welsh minister responsible for local government has

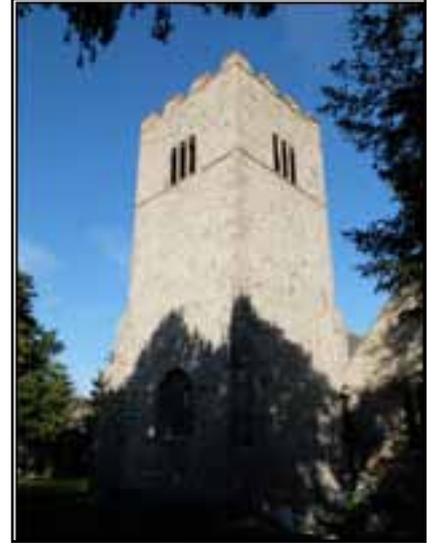
announced a review into local authority management and back office costs. He believes too much is being spent in these areas and wants to ensure resources are focussed on public facing services. Part of the archives face the public but now they are managed by back office managers with no experience and apparently little interest in the service they are paid to manage. For this service, the minister's review is overdue.

There have to be cuts and the archives must take its share but the Council's intentions involve a wholesale destruction of values and is reckless. As a first step the service should be removed to a management dealing with front facing services. A second step which seems self-evident should be a discussion with Conwy about archival partnership working to produce savings and perhaps a better service but it is unlikely this council will listen.

There have to be cuts and the archives must take its share but the Council's intentions involve a wholesale destruction of values and is reckless.

Seen in passing....

- Scaffolding has been much in evidence in town recently! The Craft centre is still shrouded, and this has been going on for months. It seems that the original roof construction left something to be desired and when the work is completed it should be 100% watertight. At least it is a relief that the costs are not a burden on us local residents who pay our taxes for the continuing high standard of this centre of artistic excellence.
- In Llanfair scaffolding was for months shrouding the church tower, which although it did not appear to be in danger of falling down, has now benefitted from a splendid restoration. From a distance the scaffold poles emerging from the tree canopy appeared like a misplaced New York skyscraper transported to North Wales.
- The corner shop of St Peter's Square opposite Barclay's Bank has had quite an interesting series of identities over the last few years. There was a period when its colour gave rise to it being colloquially known as the "Purple Shop". And then for the last two summer periods it has been a much cherished, and voluntarily manned, "Ruthin Visitor Centre". Now all signs of previous incarnations have disappeared – no purple paint, no tourist information signs – it has joined the Choochoo 'empire' of St Peter's Square shops (there are three of them). It will be sad to say goodbye to the Visitor Centre, but at least Choochoo are joining a small band of establishments that are open on Sundays helping to make Ruthin a lively town even on Sundays!
- For some time there has been concern that despite the excellent restoration of what is now Goodman, and used to be The Anchor, the façade was very bland – and dare I say, boring? Now however after more scaffolding has come and gone, we have a very decorative crest and shield representing Ruthin School set high on the end apex of the building.
- Scene on the pub front is not so promising but then again not all that dispiriting. Until recently it appeared that the Griffin in Llanbedr was closed – but now it has had a rebirth and a couple of relaunches just to confirm that news of its death was premature! Meanwhile the future of the Cross Keys, Llanfwrog is uncertain with a planning application submitted for a change of use to residential. Pubs are part of our cultural heritage and their loss is our loss. New uses for them are to be encouraged, perhaps they could encompass a small village shop or some other commercial enterprise to help make them more profitable to run and still be a centre for village social life?



- The burnt out shell of Chatwins on the corner of Wynnstay Road and Well Street is in the process of following the example of the Phoenix and arising from its ashes. It has always had a faithful clientele for its excellent bakery products and as another example of Ruthin's seemingly insatiable appetite for cafes.
- Now as we approach the depths of winter, suddenly there are attractive signs indicating the best parking for visiting Nantclwyd y Dre as one approached Castle Street from the Corwen direction. Hopefully they will still be there when



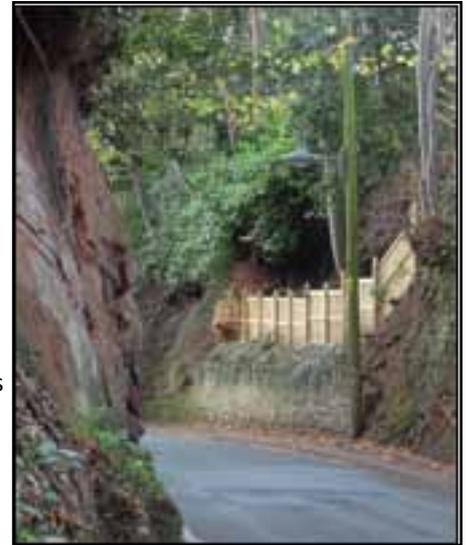
the house and garden open again next April for the summer after the winter closure, Denbighshire's cuts permitting.

- Things may look quiet at Glasdir but once the expected confirmation of the reliability of the newly constructed flood defences is confirmed and the homes can secure reasonable insurance policies, then work will recommence. There are still plans for a much needed primary school to be built on the site. Once into the New Year, with any luck, things will be in motion again.

Grumpy Old Man ...although he finds so much to admire in Ruthin he still finds that occasionally there are parts of the town that could be improved for example:-

Red Rocks – a wonderful stretch of lane, with the outcrops of the Permo-Triassic desert sandstone showing excellent dune bedding, and a canopy of vegetation, with some trees hanging on by exposed roots, attractive to birds and squirrels, and a lovely dappled light when the sun shines. Every walk/cycle/ drive into town from this end of Ruthin is a delight – spoiled only by a few habitual litter-droppers. What a shame that this little gem is now under threat.

This is compounded by, where once overhanging garden vegetation has been cleared, seemingly becoming a dumping ground for garden rubbish. Adding to that an inappropriate fence has appeared. It seems that some domestic gardens have no empathy with or care for such an attractive feature of the town. Does the County Council have any strategy to protect this little stretch of beauty?



OPEN TO IDEAS

Derek Jones invites you to - MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME!



Open to Ideas is a new column, open to all who have thoughts on how we, the Ruthin and District Civic Association, or any other local organisation, might do things differently. Never let it be said that the people of Ruthin are set in their ways!

We owe this one to Sir Simon Jenkins, retiring chairman of the National Trust, writing in The Guardian on 13th November. He notes that 'to many visitors, old houses and their past occupants lack any point of reference'. He asks: 'How would people treasure such places in future without some shared understanding and a language in which to express it?

His answer is homely, but radical. From several Trust houses, 'ropes have been removed, fires lit, people allowed to sit and read, play pianos and billiards. They are encouraged to use houses as if they were guests, rather than as visitors to a hallowed museum'.

He goes further: 'Leave visitors to their own imaginings. Let them stay all day, make themselves tea – and wash up. Let them build from there an awareness of aesthetic delight'.

I wonder if Denbighshire County Council might be open to this idea for Nant Clwyd House, as part of their readiness to house 'special events'. Perhaps there would not be room for a piano or a billiard table, but making the tea, and reading a book would surely be possible – not to mention washing up!

Nantclwyd House was, after all, a house, a place where people lived. Let's try treating it like one, rather than seeing it simply as an ancient monument or museum. The experience might, to say the least, add a new dimension to our understanding.

Of course, the Lesser Horseshoe Bats are already in residence!

Ruthin and District Civic Association

2014 AGM

The Chairman's report catalogued a full and eventful programme fulfilled over the last 12 months.

Despite the Civic Trust for Wales announcing "Open Doors – thank you and goodbye", Ruthin's own civic association had spearheaded a pan-Denbighshire celebration of opening our heritage both ancient and modern throughout the month of September to considerable success – with much thanks to Cadw's and Cadwyn Clwyd's support.

The year had started with the dedication of the library meeting room to the memory of our ex-chairman and much missed, Hafina Clwyd. It is now named Ystafell Hafina.

In addition to our monthly committee meetings, we have had regular members' social events including a talk by Fiona Gale on the restoration of Moel Famau's Jubilee Tower, Wendy Williams telling us of the work being done on Nantclwyd y Dre's Lords Garden and Gareth Evens relating the history of the Feathers Inn when the Quayle Award presentation was made.

The new publication of the much admired Slow walks round Ruthin was warmly welcomed – its absence had been much missed.

On planning matters they have carefully monitored recent applications. They have highlighted concerns over the continuing closure of the Cuning Green and welcomed, and claimed some credit for the improvements to the old railway walkway.

Town and Around continues to be produced in an updated and attractive format four times a year.

In the forthcoming twelve months we are planning to host an exciting Hustings as the Westminster elections approach. In view of the particular interest this year we are planning to hold the event at Theatr John Ambrose, Brynhyfryd on Monday 27th April. Other planned social events on our calendar include a spring talk on the newly published history of Ruthin, a summer evening of Peter Daniels' photographic records of the many changes to Ruthin's landscape in recent years, and at the AGM Fflur Jones, Outreach Officer for the National Assembly for Wales, has been invited to give her presentation entitled "Understanding and Engaging with the National Assembly for Wales".

The existing committee members were re-elected to serve a further twelve months and they were thanked for their service. They are:

Chairman – Liz Williams

Vice Chairman – Heather Williams

Treasurer – Robert Williams

Secretary – Miles Anderson

Kay Culhane

Menna Jones

Anne Roberts

Harold Jones

The formal meeting was followed by a most interesting talk given by Goronwy Wynne on "Thomas Pennant – the man who knew everyone".

Ruthin Town and Around is published quarterly by Ruthin and District Civic Association. The views expressed by the individual writers are not necessarily those of the association.

We welcome letters and contributions.

Please send them to the Editor, Miles Anderson at Silver Birches, Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd, LL15 2SD or miles-and-jill@freeuk.com

If you are interested in subscribing to the association or becoming a member, please contact our treasurer, Robert Williams on 01824 704998 or at ruthincivic@btinternet.com

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