

# 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

March 2014

### HEART OF THE MATTER (With apologies to Graham Greene)

**Derek Jones reflects on whether St Peter's Square continues to be the beating heart of Ruthin**



How often have you heard it said that St Peter's Square is 'the heart of Ruthin'? I know I have said as much – but lately I have begun to think that I have spoken the words without thinking about them too deeply. Are they still valid in 2014 – as they might have been, say, in 1914?

Well certainly the Square is made up of some splendid buildings: the early to mid-18th Century Castle Hotel (Wetherspoons), described by Edward Hubbard (in *The Buildings of Wales: Clwyd*, (1986) as 'commanding'; the Myddelton Arms (Seven Eyes), a curious hybrid of a building, whose date Hubbard is unwilling to speculate upon; the Nat West Bank, dated 1401, originally the Courthouse of the Lordship of Ruthin, much, but well, restored; Barclays Bank, a much more recent addition (1928) addition, but on

the foundations and following the design of - Exmewe Hall, very much part of 'old' Ruthin.

Given such an array, who could possibly deny the Square the right to be seen as the heart of the town? Well some might think it all a bit too aristocratic or dominated by High Street banks for them. And others might think, by contrast, that if this really is the heart of the town, why is it, in some respects, nothing better than a place to park their cars? How many times a day do you see cars crawling round it, hoping against hope that they can squeeze in somewhere – some even waiting until the present occupant of a space tortuously reverses out, whilst the cars behind queue up to resume their own search. And whoever thought it was appropriate for the heart of any town, let alone Ruthin, to be dominated by a traffic island?

So, yes, there is an unassailable case for at least some of St Peter's Square to be reserved for pedestrians only. It would not be an easy exercise for the engineers; we would all, presumably, especially shop owners, want the town to be open for through traffic. But supposing, for instance, you decided to close to traffic the area between the Post Office and the Castle Hotel...what then would you do to answer the needs of those who live in Prior Street, at present one-way – upwards. But I am sure the experts could come up with a solution.

Then, perhaps, the (newly paved) Square could come to life – more seats, café tables no longer confined to the pavement, perhaps a town notice board, even perhaps a suitably-designed and colourful shelter in which to sit and watch the world go by.

But, there's the rub...What 'world' is passing by? How often do you see the centre of town almost deserted? And how rarely do you observe chance encounters between old friends and neighbours? Admittedly, things perk up in the summer, when the tourists come, and it's nice to see them. But we surely do not want to become just a tourist town. In the end, this is our town, a place for us to experience the pleasures of urban living.

Is that achievable? Can all the traffic engineering in the world prevent the major social changes which have occurred during the past 100 years? Can St Peter's Square be claimed any longer as exclusively the heart of the town? If you want to see chance encounters, you can see and experience them every time you go

to Tesco's. If you are looking for a sense of urban enclosure without the traffic, you go to the Craft Centre courtyard. Interestingly enough, for a sense of old-style urban conversation, you might even go inside at Wetherspoons, open virtually all hours and with plenty of small nooks and crannies where you can meet friends and acquaintances and put the world to rights.

Finally, however, we have to ask, who, now, are the people of Ruthin who might hope that the Square might once again assume its proper place as the heart of the town? From recent conversations – with people as different as Tesco checkout persons or staff at Ruthin Community Hospital, I have been made aware of just how many people come in to work in Ruthin and leave again at the end of the day for Wrexham or Corwen or Mold, or even, perish the thought, for England. And the reverse is true for those who have made their home in Ruthin, but who work somewhere else. They are simply not here during the day to enjoy its delights, and when they come home from work they've possibly had enough of other people!

Of course none of this is the whole truth. We still want St Peter's Square to be re-invented as the heart of the town – for its own sake. And we don't, surely, want to live to see a 'virtual' Ruthin rather than one that we can touch and feel – or even smell! I'm surely raising more questions than I have answers to them, but I do feel that to ask some questions may be a reasonable start on our journey to the 'heart of the matter'.

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## An Eyesore - Transformed!

### Bobby Feeley Welcomes a Successful Redevelopment

In 2008 when I decided to stand for election to Denbighshire Council, I gave thought to what I would like to achieve here in Ruthin. One of the actions I highlighted in my election leaflet was the old Aibeas shop in Mwrog Street, which had been boarded up for several years after flooding. It is clearly visible from the main route into Ruthin from the Bala approach, and the extensive black boarding had looked unwelcoming and unattractive for far too long. I was also conscious that, although Denbighshire owned the site, and it had been earmarked for 30 years as a possible bye-pass route, this was obviously never likely to happen.

The site was finally purchased by North Wales Housing Association who had ambitious and exciting plans to refurbish the four original terraced cottages into affordable homes, and to build two bungalows at the rear for residents with learning difficulties. I was thrilled, not only would the dilapidated building be dealt with, but we would be providing much needed homes for vulnerable people.

Unfortunately, sometimes the wheels turn very slowly in councils. It has taken nearly six years to see this project come to fruition. Problems with planning, rights of way, listed consents etc, have taken a long time to resolve, now I am delighted to say, the end is in sight. The refurbishment works on the cottages needed to be intricate and delicate to keep as much of the original character as possible, but at the same time they have to comply with the high standards required by 'Welsh Housing Quality Standards,' I am pleased to say they will shortly be ready for occupation.

The bungalows also needed to comply with the same high standards and they also are now completed and so far occupied by three very happy residents, looked after by Denbighshire Social Services.

Yes it has taken a lot longer than I had anticipated, but the development has certainly been worth waiting for, not only is it being put to good use but the end result looks absolutely splendid.



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# Looking Behind the Facades

## Miles Anderson finds much to enjoy beyond Ruthin's shop fronts

The density of housing in the historic centre of Ruthin is less than you might have thought at first glance. For much of Well Street and Clwyd Street if you venture behind the handsome, and in some cases, not quite so handsome fronts of the buildings that line the streets, you will find many open spaces and courtyards.



In some places they back onto open fields. Behind Well Street, where now stands the antiques centre, which in its earlier incarnation as the Picturehouse restaurant and bar, you could stand on the open patio enjoying your drink within a few feet of cows cropping the lush meadow.

Higher up on the way into town, the Castle Mews Shopping centre on the left now sadly has several empty premises, but opposite things are very different. The Café at Crown House is operational again and its sitting-out area at the back, with mown grass and flower beds to counter the predominance of car parks, is well used, weather permitting.

And just a few paces further up, through the gates of Tudor House, as they are labelled, is Cellar Cycles. For the last 23 years Conan Mayman has been attending to all the various needs of the bicycling community of the Vale of Clwyd. His premises are literally in the cellar and the whole space is filled with parts and complete machines for cyclists of all ages from children's models to electric powered ones for those with diminishing pedal power. He assures me that despite our hilly terrain, cycling continues to be a very popular pastime here.

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Progressing over St Peter's Square and turning down Clwyd Street, an attractive right turn takes us into a diminutive piazza that appears to have an old well at its centre and facing us is 'Prints and Plains'. This deceptively extensive shop has for 8 years been offering a wide range of high quality of furnishing fabrics to be made up to customers' individual requirements.

Next on our right are the premises of Ruthin Memorials and then behind Finline, Eagle Bakery has been supplying, from their own ovens, high quality breads, confectionary and homemade porkpies. Wyn Roberts, head baker has been baking here for the last six years and has established a faithful following.



Retracing Clwyd

Street on the other side, there are also openings leading to Pen y Lon, offering physiotherapy and gymnasium, whilst continuing into Upper Clwyd Street, Annie's tearooms has a pretty court-yard, and behind the Vaults is a spacious yard for alfresco consumption as well as parking.

Last, but not least on this exploration of Ruthin's half hidden open spaces and business enterprises, we return to near where we started at the bottom of Well Street. Here behind the opticians and butchers there are a whole range of shops and business enterprise. Personal care is well provided for here with both ladies and gentlemen's hairdressers as well as a sunbed studio! These have been recently joined by Kirsty Shenton with her 'Butterfly Children's' shop specialising in traditional and educational games and toys. And finally in this corner are the headquarters of the internationally well known engineering, environmental and landscape consultants, Richards, Moorhead and Laing Ltd who, as they say, are "Enhancing the environment!"

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Next time you are in town, spare the time to glance behind the street's facades - you will be surprised at all the amazing things going on there.

## Seen in passing...

- A banner outside Rhos Street School is proud to proclaim their achievements. Following last year's inspection they were commended as a 'Good School with Excellent prospects'. They are the first school in Denbighshire in three years, the head tells me, to achieve an excellent report in the two main judgement reports. What a pleasure to record such an achievement – and incidentally they still have available places.
- A Job Half Done? Once all the uproar following the 'Ruthin Yellow Lines' furore has faded into the dim and distant past, the final changes to the traffic flow system that introduced some changes in its first phase, are shortly to be introduced. However, Peter Lea, principal Engineer DCC Traffic Management, assures me that they will be very minor and localised in nature with no significant impact for the town as a whole. As things stand, only a proportion of the original proposed changes were implemented. Record Street is still two way as is Market Street, and so is the short stretch of road connecting the Anchor corner with the Mold Road. The lower end of Market Street, where the buses stop, and there is now extensive residents parking, is regularly particularly congested and deserves improvement. Brewery deliveries to the pubs on Castle Street during busy mornings frequently block this particularly attractive entry point to the town centre. Perhaps a situation calling for out-of-hours deliveries? And glancing at Derek Jones views on the desirability of some pedestrianisation of St Peter's Square in his piece, 'Heart of the Matter', there is a strong sense of a more 'improvements' needed.
- As we approach Easter, the tourist businesses of Ruthin will be anticipating the start of the arrival of visitors and holiday-makers. The premises of the Ruthin Visitor Centre, on St Peter's Square still advertises itself as a volunteer tourist information office. Its future could be in doubt, but we think it of the utmost importance that it opens again and is manned by helpers to give relevant advice to those coming through its door. It was not only visitors to the town used to call in here last summer but many local residents – it tended to be quite the social centre of the town. Please can our Ruthin Visitor Centre be open again through this summer and many summers more in the future?
- At Glasdir things are still not looking so rosy! The sales office is closed and there is no evidence of any building operatives on site. If you call their telephone number, the message states that, "The office is temporarily closed and open on my return on 29th August." That is almost six months past! A call to Taylor Wimpey's head office for an update on the situation was not returned. The site appears to be abandoned. Perhaps when the various agencies come to a decision as to responsibility for the flooding, it could all spring into life again, but I wouldn't hold your breath.



- The situation of the closed Cuning Green appears similar but at least here the protagonists, the property owners and the council are local and are in discussion. It is most important that this feature of our historic town is made accessible as soon as possible. Come Easter we will start the tourist season and to have one of our most important paths closed to the public looks apathetic. And it's not only tourists what want to walk along the Cuning Green

- Back to good news (see above Rhos Street School) – The new Ruthin Leisure Centre has seen some remarkable increases in use since its recent transformation. Statistics from the office of Jamie Groves, head of Communications, Marketing and Leisure, show that, for the swimming pool, which is substantially unchanged, there has been an increase of 1,791 visits comparing October to January with the previous June to September, from a base of 8,620 – a 20.77% increase. However in the fitness suite the figure is a quite remarkable. Here there is an increase over the same periods of 7,257 compared with only 312 for the previous three months – an increase of 2,325.96%. In total there has been an increase of almost 9,000 visits in four months. No wonder they are pleased with themselves!

# A Very Green Community Centre

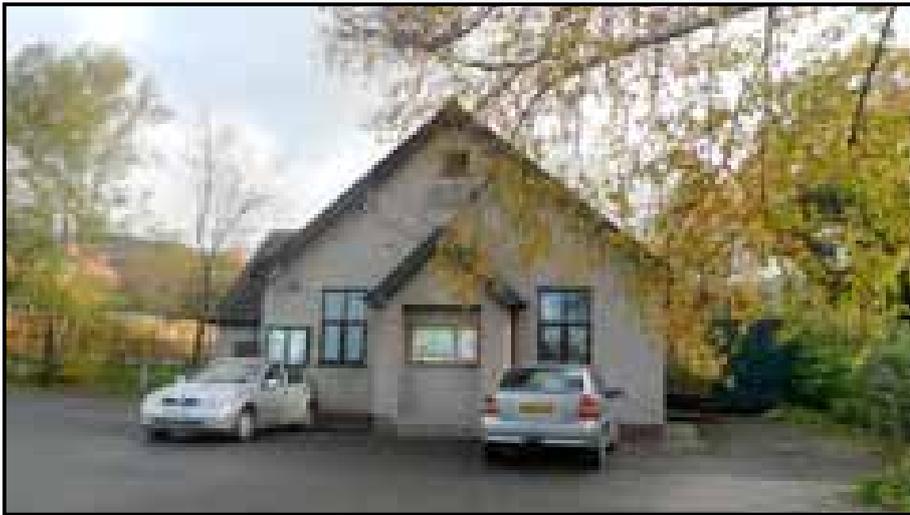
## Harold Jones highlights the environmental credentials of Llanbedr D.C. Village Hall

*... As with many other similar village halls the building became expensive to heat conventionally and not viable to keep open*

In the 1920s the residents of Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd were eager to have a proper purpose built village hall at the centre of their community. Following considerable fundraising efforts a new building was constructed and opened in 1934.

Some fifty or so years later, when the building was in the ownership of Glyndwr District Council, it was decided to refurbish the hall and this was achieved in 1988.

The hall is in the heart of the village close to St Peter's Church and The Griffin public house. It has a pitched roof covered with slates and rough cast rendered walls above a brick plinth. As with many other similar village halls the building became expensive to heat conventionally and not viable to keep open.



However, early in this century, a newly formed Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd Village Hall Association took over and put in place a new programme of modernisation with particular emphasis on energy conservation.

The go-ahead for a carbon neutral project for the hall was given in July 2010. Funding was obtained from Denbighshire County Council, Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council, the Rural Key Fund and from the Community Council. The total cost of the work was in the region of £45,000 and the project was led by renewables experts Carbon Zero UK of St Asaph.

In brief the scheme consisted of:

- Installing Solar Photo Voltaic panels for electricity generation. The feed in tariff from the panels will bring an income to the hall for the next 25 years. During 2011-2012 these payments totalled over £1500.
- Installing Solar Thermal Panels to heat the hot water.
- Providing an Air Source Heat Pump which runs the central heating. This is part powered by the solar panels on the roof.
- Installing new efficient radiators.
- Providing a rainwater collection tank at the front of the building which is protected by a timber enclosure. Rainwater from the roof supplies water for the hall's toilets. The 50,000 litres of water collected each year is sufficient for 7,000 flushes a year, or 142 a week.
- Installing new dark brown double glazed windows and doors.
- Providing loft insulation.



A few years ago the Village Hall was losing money because of the high cost of electricity and gas. It has now been transformed into a cosy building which is economically viable and environmentally friendly. It is recognised as one of Wales's greenest community centres.

The hall has plenty of space together with a kitchen and toilets and is very well used. A large number of groups meet in the building and the hall can be booked for private use.

A glance at the notice board outside the building in recent weeks indicates a wide range of activities including:

Zumba, Line Dancing, Choir, Pilates, Table tennis, Committee Meetings, Hobbyists, Computer workshop, Yoga, Scottish dancing, Miniature Railway Club, Sunday School.

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# RUTHIN'S MINERAL WATER INDUSTRY

## Arnold Hughes tells of a lost Industry

For much of the nineteenth century and during the first half of the twentieth, Ruthin was renowned for its mineral water bottling industry. It all started in 1825, when Robert Ellis, previously a druggist on the Market Square, became the first person to begin extracting, aerating and bottling high-quality water from artesian beds beneath the town in Mwrog Street. Ellis' Table Water Company, promoted its products with its familiar Prince of Wales feathers; 'Cymru am Byth' ('Wales for Ever') motto and Welsh mountain goat logo; an emblem which would be copied and be the cause of an unsuccessful legal battle with the rival Ruthin Soda Water Company (Cambrian), established in 1864 on Park Road. Whereas the Ellis' goat stood on all four legs, the Cambrian goat reared up on its hind legs. It had a different Welsh motto, as well, 'Gwlad Rydd a Mynydd i Mi' (Free land and Mountain for Me'). There was a third, smaller mineral water bottler in Ruthin, as well, the Hand Mineral Water Bottling Company in Well Street.

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Ellis's was the more successful of the two major companies, opening a brand-new bottling plant in 1856, employing nearly 60 people, just as its rival was set-up. Using the most modern equipment available, a skilled worker could fill up to 2,500 bottles a day. Employment in both works approached nearly a hundred by the late nineteenth century, in response to local, national and even international demand for aerated bottled mineral water and other drinks, such as potas, lithnia, ginger ale, seltzer water and champagne lemonade! Both companies enjoyed royal patronage following visits by the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII, while staying at Ruthin Castle. Perhaps this explains their success against rival companies in Caernarfon, Bangor, Llandudno and Wrexham.



Ownership of Ellis' had passed to Robert's two sons, Richard Gregson and Saxon Gregson, on his death and the profits from the enterprise enabled them to buy Plas Newydd in Mwrog Street and turn it into the second most grand residence in Ruthin (second only to Ruthin Castle itself), which even listed a butler in the 1851 census. From local accounts, the Ellis family were enlightened employers; socially prominent; and active in charitable causes. Robert Ellis was elected mayor in 1855, while Richard Gregson served in the same capacity on five occasions, and laid the foundation stone of the new Town Hall in 1863. Saxon Gregson was prominent in the Ruthin contingent of the Denbighshire Territorial Volunteers, serving as Major. The Anglican Ellis family were also strong supporters of the Conservative party.



The principal shareholder in the rival Cambrian company was the Gee family of Denbigh; politically miles apart from the Ellis family. They were at the centre of Liberal nonconformist and Welsh nationalist activities in the Vale of Clwyd. Thomas Gee, the patriarch, was both celebrated and condemned for his journalism - Baner ac Amserau Cymru, the leading Welsh-language publication in the area - and his political activities, including leadership of the Anti-Tithe League in the 1880s. Perhaps, because of these many other activities, and his advancing years, Gee was not a successful chairman of the Cambrian Works and, during his tenure, the company flagged. It picked up later, when his son replaced his octogenarian father in the early 1880s; even so, the company ran into terminal difficulties by 1906, when it went into receivership and was bought out by a Rhyl entrepreneur, John Cropper. In 1942-45, part of the Cambrian premises was used by the Lang Pen Company, based principally in the old Ruthin Gaol, to produce munitions.

*Both companies enjoyed royal patronage following visits by the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII, while staying at Ruthin Castle.*

Both companies benefited from a strong increase in demand for bottled mineral water during the nineteenth century; in part helped by the rise of the Temperance Movement, leading to a demand for non-alcoholic beverages. The development of railways and steam shipping, and the expansion of empire, further enabled both



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companies to find markets beyond their own localities. Later still, more efficient motor transport replaced horse-drawn carts for local deliveries.

Ellis', as well as the Cambrian, went into sharp decline in the decades after World War II and both were bought out by larger companies from north-west England. In their final years, they were nothing more than transport depots. Ellis' was acquired by Jewson and Brown of Manchester and a Preston company bought Cambrian. By 1969, the Ellis' site had been cleared but not developed. By then, the Cambrian had premises on both sides of Park Road on the junction with Prior Street; and, as late as 1972, it sought permission to extract 100,000 gallons of water a day from its bore hole; yet it had also closed down by 1975. A few decades longer and they would have cashed in on the new craze for bottled water.



Instead, the premises of both companies were totally eradicated when sold for house-building and commercial use in the 1970s – Ellis' became the Maes Ffynnon estate and the original Cambrian site turned into housing and Richard Williams, builders' merchant, acquired the land on the other side of Park Road. Yet both well-heads, where the water was drawn, survive; there is a memorial tablet in Maes Ffynnon and, during the Millennium celebrations of 2000, samples of Cambrian's artesian water, on Richard Williams' premises, were made available for the public to taste.

*Tim Jones (Transactions of the Denbighshire Historical Society, 1996). David Williams (Ruthin Local History Broadsheet, 1968).*

## LGR - On Hold!

### Bobby Feeley allays fears from Local Government Reorganisation



A few months ago there was a flurry of excitement and press articles relating to a report by Sir Paul Williams on the future of Local Government in Wales. Rumours were rife that the number of Councils in Wales were about to be drastically cut. Councils were debating their preferred options. Here in North Wales the focus was on the possibility of one, two or three councils instead of the current six, Denbighshire Councillors decided three would be preferable, probably meaning a merger with Conwy. However, the report published in February suggested reducing the number of L.A.s in Wales from 22 to 12, and the opposition was such that the First Minister has ruled out any action until after the 2016 Assembly elections.

*"The Council has made its view known in the past that the Public Sector should concentrate its efforts on improving leadership, culture and performance, rather than divert attention to large scale reorganisation of public services"*

Denbighshire Councillors met to discuss the proposals and decided against moving towards a voluntary merger and for the next few years at least, they will continue concentrating on delivering good services, despite the difficult financial climate. Council Leader, Hugh Evans said: "The Council has had time to consider carefully its response to the recommendations included in the report. The Council has made its view known in the past that the Public Sector should concentrate its efforts on improving leadership, culture and performance, rather than divert attention to large scale reorganisation of public services, that view has not changed, and whilst we will make our feelings known to the Welsh Government, only time will tell what the final outcome will be."

So, as you can understand, the so called imminent Local Government Reorganisation is indefinitely on hold and here in Denbighshire it's 'business as usual'

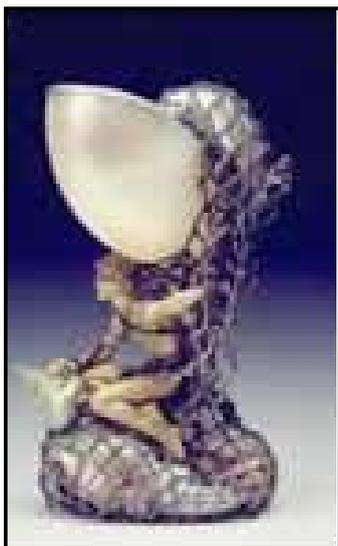
## Seen in Passing . . .

- Some other statistics worth noting - the Ruthin Food Bank will be reviewing its past year and future on the 18th March, too late for this edition of Town and Around, but in their first six months they gave assistance to 265 needy people in the Ruthin area. With some fluctuations, there has been a steady growth in the numbers of people appealing for help. In Denbigh there has been a much greater demand for their services, but it takes time for the information about this help to reach those in need and for people to overcome the perception of being stigmatised by appealing for help. The organisers take great pains to prevent any such concerns.
- At last the redevelopment of The Anchor Inn is now well under way, but it is obvious that things are going to look worse before they get better. We can't help noticing that the old hanging sign and any references to the building's historic past are rapidly disappearing. Although it may be reasonable that a young border's housing should avoid associating with a public house, for obvious reasons, but The Anchor has long been the name of this building – historic names are worth preserving, after all the Wynnstay is still known by that name even though it is no longer an hotel.
- The hurricane force winds that battered Ruthin and plunged it into darkness for a few hours on Wednesday 12th February brought a few trees down around the town. There was one notable casualty amongst the gravestones of St Peter's churchyard. It is interesting to note that these trees have, or had, connections with the Cornwallis Wests of Ruthin Castle fame.
- Despite DCC's cutbacks the Civic Associations' Open Doors celebration will join those of other societies in Denbighshire to ensure that September is a month of celebration of accessibility to otherwise closed buildings and institutions. New ideas are always necessary to give life to an on-running event such as Open Doors – this is Ruthin's 11th year. Joining forces with the Craft Centre there are going to be a number of art and craft performances and demonstrations in some of those venues that in the past have just been open for a cursory walk through, additional interest. Here in Ruthin we are also hoping to pause to look back at the town's memorabilia from the Great War, WW1. If any of our readers have letters home from the front, other documents or photographs that they would like to share, please get in touch with us and we will use them to arrange an exhibition of WW1 Memories. Please contact our chairman, Liz Williams on 07775603630/liz@pineandoakdirect.co.uk or secretary, Miles Anderson 01824 707632/miles-and-jill@freeuk.com Other ideas for 'open venues' are always welcome.
- The eye-catching house at the lower end of Clwyd Street, Porth y Dwr is currently being researched and renovated by Carol Smith. This house has had many existences, most recently as tea rooms, and Carol would be most interested if any of our readers can help her with details of Porth y Dwr's history. Her best contact details are by email carol.smith17@mypostoffice.co.uk
- It's all change at Ruthin Farmers Market. Starting in early May there is to be a massive redevelopment of the whole site. However this is an ongoing busy livestock market and the work will have to be phased in three stages to allow business to continue. They will be creating a multi-purpose hall as well as a meeting room that will be available for general use. This will also allow them to hold sales of farm and other machinery on site. It is a sign that Ruthin's place at the heart of the rural economy is well placed to continue. This commercial centre that is now almost the sole evidence of Ruthin as a Market Town – there is still the Market Hall - and we welcome the signs that its future looks good. However the bad news is that for this year only it means that Ruthin Show will not go ahead. But for next year it will be a much improved venue for the show.



## Kevin Coates 'Bestiary of Jewels'

### Philip Hughes of Ruthin Craft Centre is Enthusiastic!



Opening on Saturday April 12th 2014, Ruthin Craft Centre will hold a special exhibition of the work of artist-goldsmith, Dr Kevin Coates. A multi-talented artist Kevin Coates is a musician, jeweller, and sculptor in diverse materials. The virtuoso works of art he creates from gold, precious stones, shell, and other exotica, are both exquisite and fantastical. His work is to be found in private and public collections worldwide, including the V&A and British Museum, the Royal Museum of Scotland, the Cooper Hewitt (Smithsonian Institution) New York, and the Museum of Fine Arts. Boston.

Following a successful solo exhibition at the Wallace Collection in London in 2011, Kevin Coates has been working on an ambitious new project, a "Bestiary" of sculptural jewels in a poetic elaboration of the bizarre medieval encyclopaedias known as Bestiaries, which assemble lore and myth about animals.

Crucially, he has paired a series of individual creatures with their significant human, where the jewel is mounted in a modelled and painted Bestiary 'page'. These include A Parrot for Flaubert; A Starling for Mozart; A Rhinoceros for Kaendler; and A Dodo for Mr. Dodgson. This new body of work, which Coates describes as "a voyage of discovery... of this dream Ark of mine", will show alongside a selection of "Birthday jewels" which the artist has made over the years for his wife, Nel Romano, many of which will be exhibited for the first time in public. It is going to be a exotic, intriguing and fascinating exhibition – not to be missed!

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## A Great Launch for the Art Trail!

### "Learn about beautiful Ruthin, past and present through art", says Miles Anderson

Starting from the site of the old Railway station, itself today but a memory - and now the Ruthin Craft Centre, the idea behind the £250,000 Art Trail is "to take visitors, as well as Ruthin's residents, up through the town on a voyage of discovery", said Michael Nixon, project manager, at its launch on Monday 24th February. Market Street, which was once one of the town's less interesting entry points, is now the trail's route into the historic centre of Ruthin. It is now much enhanced with newly planted trees with coloured guards and a stylish, covered sitting place half way up. An information sign is sited at the start of the walk and



there are oak benches on which to rest as you gaze around searching the rooftops for examples of the twenty two red metal figures that are scattered about the town. "It is in looking up", we are told, "that there are so many unappreciated features of the town to be admired". Other intriguing artefacts to look out for are the ten spy holes set in the walls. Artists Lucy Strachan and Fred Baier, who developed the project, worked closely with Roger Edwards on these keyholes into the past. They represent, for example, Roger's memory of the streets being filled with sheep on Market Day. There are illustrated leaflets and audio guides are now available to assist people to see Ruthin from a new perspective

*"It is in looking up", we are told, "that there are so many unappreciated features of the town to be admired"*

# The Feathers - Reborn

## Bobby Feeley praises the restoration of this iconic pub

Most of you will by now have noticed the Feathers pub in Well Street has reopened and is looking very smart, with bright white exterior and renovated facade.

I went to meet Gareth Hughes, who along with, Grant Mann and Sion Roberts, two friends from Ruthin Rugby Club, have brought this eighteenth century ale house back to life.



*It has to be said, at a time when the pub trade is going through the doldrums, it was a very brave decision by these three young people to buy and restore a public house.*

It has to be said, at a time when the pub trade is going through the doldrums, it was a very brave decision by these three young people to buy and restore a public house. Gareth explained how strongly he felt - 'I just didn't want to stand by and watch another pub be closed and turned into residential property.'

The three friends decided to go ahead with their ambitious project and set an exacting opening target of 11 weeks from sale completion, the race was on to be open in time for the Autumn International Rugby Tournament and after that Christmas. They all worked around the clock to meet the deadline. Gareth told me how important it was to them, not only to use local traders and craftsmen, but also to source local materials, and all around the pub the evidence of this is clear to see. I was particularly impressed with the joinery and carpentry skills of Sion, who, with his father, has made the impressive bar, tables, seating and even a unique log store. The original cellar has been fully restored to cask marked accreditation, ready for the six local, high quality real ales. They also stock Llandegla cider and hope shortly to be part of an 'International Real Ale Trail' - a group of people who follow real ale round the UK.

They have decided not to do food, but have facilitated some catered events with local businesses. Undoubtedly The Feathers has the feel of a real sports pub, with several high quality screens for watching rugby, football and other sporting events. I asked Gareth if the local Rugby Club had suffered, 'We were very conscious of that so we have tied up with them to support club development, we run regular raffles and supply a certain amount of beer.' The pub also supports local teams, hockey, rugby and football and supply refreshments for local matches. They employ a full time manager and 13 part time jobs, as to the future, they are renovating the top two floors into a high quality holiday flat and they are hoping to put Ruthin on the map with a beer festival. They would also like to be part of the popular Route 76 beer trail weekend.

The renovation of The Feathers has not been without problems, and along the way various hold-ups occurred with planning, building control and licensing all needed to be complied with and, at times, the opening deadline looked precarious, but they persevered and won through in the end. This has been a labour of love and determination, a vision by three young Ruthin men, determined to restore and make a success of a local public house against all the odds. I wish them well for the future.

*They also stock Llandegla cider and hope shortly to be part of an 'International Real Ale Trail' - a group of people who follow real ale round the UK.*

*This has been a labour of love and determination, a vision by three young Ruthin men, determined to restore and make a success of a local public house against all the odds*

# Open Doors – Open Heritage

## “Could this be Ruthin’s last year?” asks Miles Anderson

*Using the ‘Open Doors’ idea, there are metaphoric doors that can be opened, doors into people’s minds, their lifetime’s experiences and doors to people’s homes and work places.*

When The Civic Trust for Wales were taking onboard the idea of having events of free access to buildings they adopted the distinctive name of Open Doors – Drysau Agored. In so doing they were developing the theme of ‘Open Heritage’ as the Europe-wide project was known.

‘Heritage’ it was felt here in Wales was too confining, it was considered to be, all about dusty old buildings. And this project does not have to be confined to buildings anyway. Using the ‘Open Doors’ idea, there are metaphoric doors that can be opened, doors into people’s minds, their lifetime’s experiences and doors to people’s homes and work places. For the words Open Doors substitute Open Access and the possibilities are endless!



At one time it looked as though the event may not even take place at all. A message from the Civic Trust for Wales was headed “Open Doors – thank you and goodbye”! Although here in Ruthin it was expected that with support from Cadwyn Clwyd we would still be able to mount a programme of events. However, one of our concerns was that under the umbrella of The Civic Trust for Wales they

had covered us for public liability. Without such cover the event was seemingly untenable.

*Philip Hughes at the Craft Centre has come up with an excellent programme of various artists demonstrating their skills in many of these buildings*

Good news came that CADW have stepped into the breach and taken over not just the name, ‘Open Doors’, but also the responsibility for similar administration of this year’s event. Nevertheless financial support is dependent on us having an innovative programme - after ten years most interested people have seen the inside of the chapels, churches and other public buildings. So what now?

Philip Hughes at the Craft Centre has come up with an excellent programme of various artists demonstrating their skills in many of these buildings – added interest. This year’s new programme to be devised needs more personal input. All buildings should have volunteers there to describe and tell their history. In recent years we have arranged conducted tours of various schools and local manufacturers with experts to tell how they operate - all good stuff.

There is scope for more commercial premises to open their doors and follow this example. Also, people love to visit interesting private homes – seeing how the other half live, so to speak, but this is not easy to arrange. One such very popular home could not be opened last year because there were no volunteers to assist the owner cope with all the potential visitors. What a shame!

*Could we have more volunteers to help with this prestigious event? Every year we get nothing but praise . . .*

Could we have more volunteers to help with this prestigious event? Every year we get nothing but praise – well there are always a few minor grumbles, but these mainly are about the Gaol and Nantclwyd y Dre not being open free on both days. The Welsh government support the concept of free access, so surely these two buildings under the control of Denbighshire could do the same?

# Nantclwyd y Dre

## Gareth Evans reports of new developments



Great things will be happening at Nantclwyd y Dre this year. The major heritage lottery funded renovation of the Lord's Garden will be starting shortly. This will see the large former castle kitchen garden restored and made accessible to visitors. A huge area of green space right in the middle of Ruthin will be open to visitors and the community alike who will be able to explore hitherto untapped features of the town's heritage.

The house itself has not been forgotten. This grade 1 listed building has been charming visitors for several years and now work will begin to improve the visitor experience. The Friends of Nantclwyd y Dre, the local group which helps maintain and improve the house, has teamed up with Denbighshire County Council and Cadwyn Clwyd, the local rural development group, to develop a project to re-order the ground floor. Currently access is up the side of the house and through the back door. This has confused visitors and the main entrance will in future be the front door so that visitors will enter the house directly from Castle Street. As Murray Bragg, secretary of the Friends, said 'This will be a clearer and more welcoming entrance and people will understand they are entering a fine old building with an interesting history'.

A new shop will be created to promote local heritage and, as the present reception area is moved a new space, this will become available and the opportunity will be taken to create a nineteenth century kitchen. As Murray explains 'We have always felt the lack of a room to interpret the lives of those who worked in the house and their connections with the town'. So, the kitchen will be assembled by the Friends who will research local resources and source furniture and kitchen artefacts themselves.

The Friends will also create a new dining area and create a second world war meal exploring the impact of rationing on Ruthin life. Any help to create the kitchen and dining room will be gratefully received. Help with information about family members who

may have worked in domestic service between 1850 and 1914 anywhere in Ruthin, kitchen artefacts from the period or with documents would be much appreciated. If anyone can help please contact me on 01824704564

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## Have You Paid Your Subs?

The Ruthin and District Civic Association, whose publication this is, relies on its members subscriptions to continue its good work to care for and promote all that is good in Ruthin and its surrounding villages. Many think to receive this quarterly publication alone is worth the annual payment that is currently only £8 or £12 for joint membership – we couldn't possibly comment! If unsure of your current membership, give treasurer, Robert Williams a call on 01824 704998

## Would you like to sponsor this publication?

In recent years the Ruthin and District Civic Association have undertaken to do a mega-print run for one of our quarterly editions. This was the September one when we were anxious to give maximum coverage to our Open Doors celebration which, for Ruthin, was the last weekend of the month. Financial constraints have caused us to abandon that delivery to every Ruthin household. Offers of sponsorship could allow us to reinstate this town-wide distribution once a year – or even throughout Ruthin for every edition. Ideas, suggestions and offers please to our editor at the contact details below.

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We welcome letters and contributions.

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