

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 2015

U3A in Ruthin

Rose Hislop finds huge enthusiasm for the idea



Over 100 people came along to a launch of a local u3a for Ruthin and the surrounding villages which was held on February 24th in Ruthin Rugby Club. Speakers included the Chairperson of Dyffryn and Conwy u3a, Jim Black, the North Wales Chairperson, Hilary Jones and Philip Johnson who is responsible for assisting new u3a's in North Wales. They covered the underlying principles of the Charity, how interest groups are formed and run and also gave the National overview of u3a's.

The u3a or University of the Third Age was initially started in France in the early 1970's and reached Britain about a decade later. It has spread to become a worldwide phenomenon. It is a self help organization and is dependent on its members sharing skills and interests to provide a wide variety of different interest

groups, all of which are run on a not for profit basis.

There is no lower age limit to join but members must not be in full time work or seeking full time work. As a consequence it does tend to attract retired or semi retired people who have a wealth of varying experiences and knowledge between them.

A vote was taken at this launch after the speakers had given their talks so those present knew more about how u3a's are run. It was agreed unanimously that the formation of a new u3a for Ruthin and the surrounding areas should go ahead.

Many offers to run interest groups were forthcoming. These are some of the activities offered, scrabble, geology, quizzes, history, sugarcraft, reading group, ipad for beginners, theatre goers, forensic psychology and cycling.

The next meeting will take place on March 24th at 10.30 in Ruthin Rugby Club. At this meeting those interested will register as members, sign up for their chosen interest groups and pay the annual subscription, likely to be around £15 per year.

For any further information please contact Rose Hislop preferably on rose@hislop.co.uk or on 01824705331

The General Election 2015 – Clwyd West Hustings

Following our recent tradition, the Ruthin and District Civic Association will be holding a Hustings when all the candidates will be invited to answer questions from the general public.

The date this year is Tuesday 28th April at Theatr John Ambrose, Ysgol Brynhyfryd, 7.00 for 7.30. Once all the nominations are in after 9th April, we will widely publicise this event through the media and poster campaigns. All are warmly welcome.

MERGERS ON OR OFF

After all the planning Bobby Feeley regrets the waste of time and effort

So it's all mergers off, for now at least! For the last two years or so, we were told mergers will happen, the expensively commissioned, lengthy Williams report, stated clearly 22 Welsh Local Authorities should be cut to 10 or 12, status quote was no longer sensible or sustainable. In general the merger proposals were not well received by councils across Wales, particularly down south, the Welsh Government, then decided to offer 'voluntary merger' all tof office by 1 year to achieve this goal. The indication was there would be financial incentives, very tempting when budgets are so tight.

Denbighshire and Conwy decided to follow the recommendation to merge, with good reason, we are culturally similar, both have rural Welsh speaking areas, both have coastal conurbations, both have substantial elderly populations, in addition we are already working together in many areas. BCU Health Board, the biggest in Wales, is about to sub-regionalise in line with the Williams report, with an Area Director for Denbighshire/Conwy.

The Local Government (Wales) Bill, outlining the merging process, was published on 26th January. On 27th January, the day after the Bill was published, recommending voluntary mergers by 2018, the Minister, Leighton Andrews, rejected the 6 voluntary merger proposals and stopped the process in its tracks!

Local Authorities across Wales are bewildered, confused and angry; no wonder people are disillusioned and dissatisfied with politicians. Cynics would say the WG have withdrawn because there are two elections within the next year, they are worried of upsetting Labour



voters. In publishing a Bill outlining proposals and timescales for merging Councils, almost simultaneously with withdrawing from those very proposals, they have made themselves look incompetent, incapable of clear sound vision and totally lacking in all credibility, they have left Councils, councillors, and residents wondering what next!

Quayle Award 2014

A close call as Miles Anderson reports

The public response to our appeal for contenders for the Quayle Award for 2014 was good. This year there was a real enthusiasm with several projects being nominated. When our sub-committee met to discuss the various appeals of the main contenders, there was an interesting trio of worthy proposals to be considered, and all very different in character.

Historically the first was the Lucy Strachan and Fred Baier Ruthin Art Trail. This was finally launched in January after a number of years' gestation, to much public acclaim. Something quite innovative! There are many profoundly different aspects to the trail – tree planting (see a report elsewhere on the decline in urban trees), the athletic steel figures to be seen only with some difficulty clambering over the roofs, and the spy holes, much enjoyed once their interpretation was noted. As well, not to forget the restoration of St Peter's gates and the intriguing illustrations on the car park barriers.



Second in time was the long overdue restoration of the properties on Mwrog Street opposite the junction with Lon Fawr. There was general agreement that anything would have been better than longstanding dereliction that greeted visitors to the town as they arrived on the trunk road from Dolgellau to Birkenhead. It was a disgrace! The loss of the original shop is regretted but the multi-purpose accommodation that replaces it has been constructed with sensitivity and to a very high standard. And the old post box has also been brought back into use. Though a modest terrace of buildings, the restoration has been accomplished to the highest quality and certainly draws the eye – with pleasure!

It was later in the year that the recovery of the Old Anchor, once an hotel, pub and restaurant of quality, and in recent years semi-derelict, finally closed its doors, was completed. Its rescue by Ruthin School is to be commended and those who have had the pleasure of inspecting the new interior report on its excellence. The outside, though some may see it as austere, has a dignity and simplicity that brings with it an air of almost elegance.

After debate, consideration of the pros and cons of one project rather than another, it was decided that the Mwrog Street redevelopment was a worthy winner. Many congratulations to North Wales Housing Association.

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Rhos Street School, Ysgol Pen Barras and the Glasdir development?

Miles Anderson assesses the arguments



As a civic association what should be our concern regarding the town's primary schools, their development and location?

Ruthin and District Civic Association has declared on numerous occasions that its area of concern is not necessarily the town's built environment. The interaction of our citizens, with its buildings and its institutions is an equal if not greater concern.

Schools, and particularly primary schools where our children spend six or more of their early formative years are probably the most important institutions of any town. Here in Ruthin, two of our schools are at the crossroads. There is no doubt that Rhos Street and Ysgol Pen Barras are in need of investment and redevelopment. The one, a legacy of the Victorian era little suited to the 21st Century, the other a series of buildings, mostly temporary, is even more badly situated. It is generally agreed that the facilities they share, with the possible exception of a communal kitchen, though particularly the assembly hall and playing fields, need to be exclusively available to each school.

Before assessing the proposals and the alternatives that are being considered, let it be firmly established that the quality of

the education provided by each school is excellent. It is therefore of the greatest importance in seeking to create buildings fit for a 21st Century education that we don't lose the warm, supportive educational structure that has served both so well in the past. So often, redevelopments have provided a chrome and glass, clinical structure with no heart.

It is brilliant and commendable that the Local Education Authority has secured £8.9million for this project. On the other hand the likely time constraints mean that if it is not used by 2017, it could vanish.

It is proposed that both schools relocate to Glasdir as a part of the project and it seems likely that a full cabinet will endorse this proposal.

If that is to happen, how would it leave Ruthin? There would be a cluster of primary schools, including Borthyn all located in a narrow area of the town. The location of Glasdir with its limited pedestrian access to and from the northern part of the town will of necessity mean more cars of the school morning and evening runs – that is assuming parents have an available vehicle. At present it is estimated that nearly 50% of children attending Rhos Street School walk to school. Children walking to school is something highly desirable from a health and cultural point of view.

Whereas there is little to lose and a great deal to gain from relocating Ysgol Pen Barras to Glasdir, and it would prove a positive benefit for this semi-dislocated

housing development, the same compelling argument cannot be made for Rhos Street School. First, and probably of minor significance, it would no longer be Rhos Street School away from its present location. Its current placement serves the community of eastern and southern Ruthin very well, whereas Ysgol Pen Barras draws from a wider catchment area. Schools become the heart of the community. Close to so many residential areas of the town the call for it to remain, once redeveloped to 21st Century standards, on its current site is strong. The playing fields behind, it is understood, are designated as an open recreation space.

The problem if Rhos Street School were to be redeveloped on its current site, where it serves the community so well and has an excellent cultural and academic record, is that by 2017 the funding is at risk of not being available.

The question then to be addressed is, should the education provision of our young children during their most formative years be determined by an arbitrary date of reconstruction or a need to relocate to a less propitious site?

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North Wales Civic Societies get together

Heather Williams meets other North Wales Societies

Have you ever wondered which other towns/areas have active Civic Societies in North Wales? Well there are quite a few of them, so the Civic Trust for Wales recently invited Civic Societies in North Wales to meet together in the splendid surroundings of the Guildhall in Conwy. There was a good turn out with representatives from nine societies - Bangor, Colwyn Bay, Conwy Valley, Denbigh and District, Llandudno, Menai Bridge and District, Mold, Wrexham and, of course, Ruthin.

Anna Lermon, Project Officer with Civic Trust Wales explained the activities of the umbrella organisation - which has recently had problems with cuts in funding, which has led a reduction in its staff and activities. This has led to the main focus of its activity being found on the website <https://civictrustwales.wordpress.com/> where it provides information to civic societies about issues of interest eg. planning matters, carrying out characterisation studies. It also provides details about the work that civic societies are doing and links to websites of societies.



A survey report on the Civic Societies in Wales (50 societies) carried out in 2014 was given. In terms of 'what societies do' the majority commented on planning applications (90%); organised lectures and public events (72%); engaged with the local development plan (76%); undertake historic research (62%); and under half of societies had design award schemes (41%). Communication with members is important for Civic Societies. Last year 69% of societies produced a newsletter and 55% have a society website <https://civictrustwales.wordpress.com/network/>. About half the societies had members' email addresses as a means of communication. Most did not use social media (eg twitter). In terms of the top priorities of societies, these were to attract new members on to the committee; get younger members; increase membership; engage with other groups; engage in the planning process and focus on specific projects.

Civic Trust Wales is a key member of a new group, Wales Heritage Group, and acts as the secretariat. The group, whose membership includes representatives of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), Georgian Group and Victorian Society, meet quarterly to discuss matters of mutual interest. Civic Trust Wales is also becoming a new charity incorporated organisation on 1 April, and will be known as Civic Trust Cymru - which will provide protection for the trustees.

Each Civic Society present at the meeting then had an opportunity to give a report about its focus and interests/concerns. These reports reflected aspects highlighted in the 2014 survey, with some having a particular focus eg Mold Civic Society concentrates on historic research. It was considered that we could learn from each other, as different societies had experience that would be useful to other groups eg setting up websites, newsletters, awards, Open Doors. It is hoped that meetings of Civic Society representatives could take place twice a year to discuss topics of interest - as used to happen a few years ago. It was also suggested that visits to other Civic Societies might be useful - in fact in the 1990s this society did exchange visits with other Civic Societies, both in Wales and England.

It's reassuring to know that many Civic Societies have their ups and downs. Conwy Civic Society, which was one of the earliest civic societies founded in 1966, fell into a state of being inactive a few years ago due to a lack of membership. Following this meeting of the North Wales Civic Societies, a meeting was held in the evening to re-launch the Society, and, it would appear, with success.

You may be interested to know that the same sort of thing has also happened here in Ruthin! Ruthin and District Civic Society (a registered charity) was established in 1970, but then ceased to function in the 1980s. A new society, also registered as a charity was launched in 1988 - which has slightly changed its name over time - now known as Ruthin and District Civic Association (one of the problems was that the old Civic Society was not removed as a charity until 1996).

These two examples show how the sustainability of any organisation depends on having an active membership and the need to attract new members (new blood!) onto the committee - so please contact us if you are interested on coming on the committee, as there is a vacancy!

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Ruthin Foodbank continues its good work!

Nick Snape tells how it continues to help families in crisis

Ruthin Foodbank is now approaching its second anniversary having opened at Awelon Community Centre, Ruthin, in April 2013 and together with the Denbigh Foodbank, with which Ruthin is closely linked, are now known collectively as the Vale of Clwyd Foodbank.

The Ruthin Foodbank commenced operation following the generous commitment of two years financial support in regard to basic running costs from Ruthin Rotary Club, funding that was crucial in enabling the Ruthin Foodbank to commence its operation. Further important financial support has been received from Ruthin Town Council and from other sources such as from Capel y Dyffryn, Brynhyfryd School and local individuals, donations that are of course essential for the running of the Foodbank but also reflect the generosity of the Ruthin Community. That continuing generosity, for which the Foodbank is extremely grateful, is also reflected in the amount of food donated to the Foodbank, not only at the twice yearly Tesco collections, but on a weekly basis, in Tesco's permanent collection box, from local Chapels and Churches, other collection points and from individual members of the public. The Foodbank can only say thank you to the wider Ruthin community for their generosity and support.

The Foodbank was established with the support of a terrific group of local volunteers, numbering over 30 people who formed a management team and four rota groups to look after the Thursday opening and it is that sustained and positive response from the volunteers and the community that has allowed the Foodbank to continue to function.

Ruthin Foodbank is open on a Thursday morning between 10.30am and 1.00 pm at Awelon Community centre in Ruthin. Clients attend at the Foodbank following the issue of a Foodbank voucher by one of the members of a network of Foodbank Voucher holders. These voucher holders, which include professional organisations, charities, doctors and schools, use their professional judgement in issuing the vouchers to individuals and families who they identify as being in need or in crisis. Occasionally clients attend at the Foodbank without a voucher where the volunteers will endeavour to assist them.

When a client attends, which in itself can be very challenging for those concerned, the volunteers will make them welcome, offer a warm drink and provide at least 3 days emergency food from a set menu. The intention of that food is to allow that individual or family some breathing space to address their immediate difficulties and as a consequence most clients only attend the Foodbank on one or two occasions, although there are of course some exceptions to that rule when more sustained support is required.

There are undoubtedly some misconceptions about the clients who attend the Foodbank and the reasons why they need that support. The experience of Ruthin Foodbank is that there are many different reasons that put individuals and families in crisis and that clients come from all areas of the community. Redundancy, illness, benefit delays, low income, domestic violence, debt, family breakdown, businesses failures and paying for the additional costs of heating during winter are just some of the reasons why people find themselves in crisis, often in circumstances outside their control and suddenly unable to afford to put food on their tables.

Since opening in April 2013 and through to the end of December 2014 the Ruthin Foodbank has provided emergency food to 482 people which includes 154 children. Taking the Vale of Clwyd Foodbank as a whole, during this period just over 4000 people including 1630 children have received support and that need for support from the Foodbank at this time shows no sign of abating.

Should anyone wish to know more about the Foodbank or how it operates then they are very welcome to attend at Ruthin Foodbank on Thursday mornings during opening hours when the volunteers will be happy to answer any questions and show them how the Foodbank works.

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Rural Bus Services

Peter Daniels reports positively on service provision

Bus services in rural Denbighshire are the best that they have ever been. If that sounds subjective, you can compare current timetables with those published from the 1950s onwards. Services offered result from a positive partnership between the county council and operators. Indeed, for about 45 years, the council and its predecessors have offered financial support to sustain bus services.

Such support is discretionary, not mandatory. Everyone knows that the council needs to reduce its discretionary spend significantly. Buses are not exempt. Bus services are about to see the first significant reductions since the mid-1990s.

Recent consultations show that passengers value buses highly. There is also a real social need. Consultees in rural areas also told the council they prefer real buses to taxi alternatives. Council officers and operators alike have both risen to the challenge of providing as good a service as possible with about 20% less funding. Many services therefore change on April 7th, 2015.

First, the good news. As timetables are now being finalised, at the time of writing, half-hourly services such as between Ruthin and Denbigh (X5, X50) and hourly between Ruthin and Wrexham (X50) will remain largely intact. This is to the benefit of villagers along the way and townspeople alike. Over recent years, the Denbigh - Wrexham corridor has become successful. Remember that back in 1981 the Ruthin - Wrexham section reduced from half-a-dozen journeys to none at all and a year later to a return journey on Mondays and Saturdays only.

Buses between Ruthin and Mold via Llanferres or Eryrys will see some deterioration. This was a very difficult corridor to consider, with many competing priorities. Inevitably, there are compromises in trying to link seven Denbighshire villages to their nearest town and doctors; cater for those travelling from town to town; and from Ruthin and A494 villages to Chester.

Other than the withdrawal of the last return journeys between Denbigh, Llandrymog and Ruthin, the Denbigh - Graigfechan service (76) is safe.

Passengers who use buses between Ruthin, Pwllglas, Bryn SM, Gwyddelwern and Corwen see a mixed bag of changes. Morning buses remain hourly but not so in the afternoons (when fewer tend to travel). It is now impossible to maintain through buses between Ruthin, Corwen, Llangollen & Wrexham, introduced in 2009. Now, passengers from Ruthin and villages south on the A494 will need to change at Corwen to go east to Llangollen or beyond. This will prove unpopular. The key, though, is maintaining a useable link between Ruthin & Corwen for shopping, personal business and doctors at either of the two centres.

This leaves deeper rural areas such as Clawddnewydd, Cyffylliog, Bontuchel, Llanelidan, Betws GG and Melin y Wig. These passengers already have least choice. For now, their services into Ruthin remain similar. I say "for now" because they are costly to provide for the few who travel. Relentless financial pressures this & next year will inevitably mean that the council considers these and indeed all bus services again, in the future.



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Seen in passing...

- Now that the scaffolding is off the Craft Centre, there will be little of it about in the town. As we approach Easter, the opening of the tourist season, it is good for all the delights of the Ruthin to be seen without the intrusive scaffold poles spoiling the view.
- As the months go by and, we understand that Denbighshire have satisfactorily completed their remedial work, there seems to be no current activity at Glasdir. We were therefore pleased to have this report from them; "We are working with the mortgage lending and insurance industries to try to make sure that there is full support for the resumption of sales and construction activities on the site. We want to resume activities as soon as possible, but it is vital that our customers will be able to obtain building insurance and mortgages on normal commercial terms. As a company we want to complete the development as planned, but obviously we do need to be sure that people can buy what we build." Although nothing can be certain at this stage, the future prospect is looking much more reassuring – fingers crossed!
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- It is interesting to see that having installed four self-checkout points at the Co-op, there is a reluctance on the part of their regular customers to use them. Probably customers, like myself when I call in first thing in the morning for a paper, appreciate having an interaction with a real person, as well as avoiding that irritating admonition, "Unexpected item in bagging area".
- It is sad to see Crown House café closed – it didn't re-open after the Christmas and New Year break. However the good news is that there are two more recently recommended restaurants in town, Annes and the Star which has had a somewhat chequered history since we bestowed on it the Quayle award in 2009. And, for the first time in many years, all the retail outlets on St Peter's Square are fully operational – the last to spring back into life as another carpet shop.
- As a Civic Association, we are concerned at the planning proposals for the demolishing of Llanbedr Hall and the proposed building of a crescent of new homes in its place. We have an open mind on the redevelopment of older properties that have possibly outlived their original design, but our concern is that any such redevelopment should be appropriate to its setting and in character with its environment.



- For those of us who have encountered the traffic holdups on Wernfechen Road, which are particularly severe during the morning and evening rush hours, there will be relief that the problem of parked cars there is being tackled. For those living along that particular stretch of road who will no longer be able to park outside their homes, of course, it is another matter. We will have to wait and see what the outcome is. In the mean time there is, we hear, a further review to be carried out into the situation of parking in Ruthin. Is there to be no end to reviewing parking in Ruthin? Obviously people like to park their cars as near as possible to their homes, but it is also important for traffic to flow freely through the town. And when the summer visitors arrive they too will need spaces to park and enjoy the delights of our historic town.



- On the subject of parking, it was reported that so many Christmas shoppers were taking advantage of the free parking at the Ruthin Craft Centre to shop in town, that those potential visitors to the café and gallery, were unable to access them!

- By the time this edition is in circulation the early flowering snowdrops will be dying back. This is the perfect time to lift them and transplant – whilst they are still green. The helpers to the restoration project of the Lords' garden, taking place at Nantclwyd y Dre, would be very happy to receive any surplus snowdrops that gardeners might have available to give them.

- Ruthin prides itself on its good appearance. This doesn't happen by chance! Someone has to go round and pick up all the litter that despite appeals, always seems to gather along the way. This year the Annual Town Clean-up Campaign will take place on Saturday, 28th March. It is organised by RTC and Rotary. Volunteers wishing to help out should contact Dafydd Williams, Ruthin Town Clerk or any member of Rotary to offer their services. Please do volunteer to help make our town clean and welcoming!



- We are delighted that for this Hustings on Tuesday April 28th, we will be inviting all members of the public to "Meet the Candidates" for the Westminster elections at Ysgol Brynhyfryd. This is an excellent end prestigious venue for such an occasion. But when discussing the occasion, a friend suggested, "And, of course, you will be holding it at the Town Hall?" The comment served as a reminder that to all intents and purposes, we no longer have a functioning Town Hall. The building that stands on Market Street with one of our plaques on it no longer serves its original function as a meeting place for the people of our town. Although if one looks back to the 18th Century, such public meetings would probably have been in the open, on St Peter's Square!

- Ruthin's 'Grumpy Old Man strikes again – Do a selection of large lumps of concrete on Railway Street do anything to enhance this main road of our town centre? Over the wall the path through that decorative strip of parkland with its new path is a great improvement whereas across the road, these 'Soviet' style, barricades to parking spaces are an eyesore. Surely the cost of something more decorative would not be prohibitive?

‘The History of Ruthin’

Heather Williams find it a book that paints a fascinating picture of Ruthin through the centuries

In the introduction to the book, the authors boldly state that ‘the time is ripe for A History of Ruthin’. Not only are previous publications about the town rather dated, but it was thought that a fuller and more scholarly account of the town’s long past was needed - to cover many aspects of life from prehistory to the modern day.

This was the challenge that four local historians - Roger Edwards, Gareth Evans, Arnold Hughes and Gwynne Morris set themselves. Certainly it was a difficult challenge given the wide span of history covered, the mass of material researched and the practical aspect that four writers were involved with the task - which could have led to a rather dis-jointed effort. Last but not least, the team needed to produce a bilingual publication - unusual for a book of this length (over 175 pages of text each in English and Welsh) - which had to be completed within a limited period in order to meet the funders’ timescale.

Whilst the authors state that the book is a scholarly account of the history of Ruthin, it is not written in an academic style. In fact it is a very accessible and readable book, citing only a few authors within the main part of the text. There are, perhaps, a few words which might have some people reaching for a dictionary; these are words which are not in common usage now, such as some former professions, or technical language such as ‘midden heap’ - but the book is aimed to educate!

The book is a fascinating read which brings to life the past history of the town and paints a vivid picture of what it was like to live here. Snippets include descriptions such as the medieval streets being composed of single storey buildings of mud walls and thatched roofs, and rubbish being collected by open carts scattered around the town in the nineteenth century.

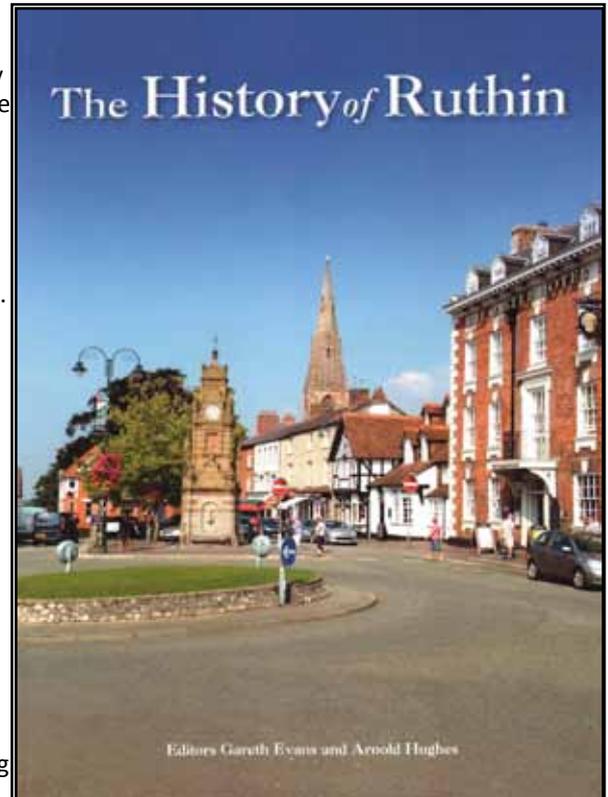
There are explanations of the origins and changes of places/street names and how the town developed, although some readers in years to come may be at a loss to know where the ‘Anchor Corner’ is - in the same way that not many people know that originally this area was called Town End.

The book also provides an interesting insight into the changes in Ruthin’s economy, from the weaving and leather-making industry during Tudor times to the manufacturing of bottled mineral water in the nineteenth/twentieth century. Significant changes in communications are touched on – it seems incredible that during the 1730s it took three to four days to travel from Liverpool to Ruthin!

The book refers to dates of relatively recent events and developments, (such as the opening of shops and the animal market) which residents see taking place, but can’t necessarily remember when. Whilst ‘Town and Around’ and the ‘Free Press’ note various changes taking place, these publications tend to get thrown away, whereas a book is a more permanent record.

In an ideal world it would have been helpful if there had been a more detailed contents page – to include the subheadings in each chapter. More complex, particularly as it is bilingual, it would have been advantageous to have an index, but it is appreciated that this would have involved a lot of additional work. Also it would have been useful to have illustrations, particularly maps, more closely linked within the main text. I suspect the lack of time before the impending deadline was responsible for these issues.

However these are minor comments and do not detract in any way from the conclusion that the book has a wealth of information written in an interesting and engaging style. I am sure that many people with an interest in the town will want to keep on dipping into the book in order to absorb its fascinating contents.



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The First Fifty Years of Ruthin Citizens' Advice Bureau

Ruth Bacon finds much to praise



The need for the service was, as had been envisaged, great. Evacuation, homelessness, rationing and tracing missing persons are a few examples of what the bureau had to deal with.

Glyndwr District Council allowed the bureau to use the rooms with no charge for rent, rates heating or lighting and provided carpeting and had the rooms decorated throughout.

The idea of a free advice service to be run mainly by volunteers was first devised by the National Council for Social Service and other bodies as war loomed in 1938. The plan was immediately put into effect as war started in September 1939 and within a month 200 bureaux were up and running in all manner of makeshift premises. The need for the service was, as had been envisaged, great. Evacuation, homelessness, rationing and tracing missing persons are a few examples of what the bureau had to deal with. By 1943 there were 1060 bureaux, all giving free and confidential advice on any matter the clients raised. By now voluntary organisations such as the Red Cross, St. John Ambulance Brigade, Rotary and Round Table were financially supporting what was now called the National Association of Citizens' Advice or NACAB. Ninety percent of the staff were volunteers, mainly persons with professional or social work experience, all willing to give a few hours of their time each week to help people in need. From these beginnings the Citizens' Advice organisation as we know it was born. It had been anticipated that post war demand for the service would diminish but worth peace a fresh set of social problems arose so the work continued. The first bureaux had mainly been in large urban centres but by the late fifties the needs of rural communities were becoming recognised. By the early sixties it was also recognised that access to information services were becoming an essential feature of modern life.

In 1962 a meeting was held to discuss the possibility of opening a CAB bureau in Ruthin. A Mrs Weeks, described as the Northern CAB Officer came from Manchester to address it. Unfortunately only five people attended...three were local and the other two were from the recently opened Colwyn Bay bureau who had come along to give support! At this meeting it was estimated that an annual outlay of £40 - £50 would be needed!

Despite this unpromising start, Ruthin CAB opened to the public on January 6 1964. it was first housed in a back room on the first floor of the Ruthin Rural Community Council's offices at 5 Upper Clwyd Street. It had a few reference books and some furniture - no telephone, typewriter nor even a filing cabinet! The first client appeared on January 10th asking for the names of wrought iron manufacturers. Other enquiries soon followed and in the first fifteen months 215 were recorded. In 1969 the bureau was offered better accommodation on the ground floor and being more visible to the public, numbers rose. Then in 1974 thanks to the re-organisation of local government two small rooms became vacant at the rear of the town hall. Although somewhat cramped they were more central and, importantly, private. Again there was a rise in client numbers. In May 1980 the bureau had its fourth move to two and a half rooms at the front of the town hall and three years later to what had been the resident caretaker's quarters. These premises were completely private and self-contained with their own entrance. Glyndwr District Council allowed the bureau to use the rooms with no charge for rent, rates heating or lighting and provided carpeting and had the rooms decorated throughout. In 1985 an outreach centre was opened in Corwen. The final move to the present bureau in the old fire station was made in 2003. Now there are three interview rooms, a main office, a waiting room, a store room and even a small kitchen.

Since its inception the bureau has changed in many ways both in adviser training and use of technology which made its appearance with a private telephone in 1975, quickly followed by a type-writer purchased for £34. A photo-copier was purchased in 1983 and a small hand-held computer programmed for calculating benefits in 1984. In 1985 the bureau was one of three chosen in Wales in a NACAB research project and was supplied with a micro-computer and printer. A microfiche system was introduced meaning all the information in the bureau's files was now portable and could be taken to the Corwen outreach - a great advantage. Later the acquisition of an "ansaphone" was able to tell callers when the bureau was open. 2004 saw the end of laborious hand-written records when an online computer programme was introduced and now access to vast areas of information is available.

Volunteers are always sought, Welsh speakers being particularly in short supply. Adviser training is comprehensive. If you are interested in volunteering and would like more information call in the bureau. It is open Tuesday to Friday from 9:30 until 1:00. Alternatively phone 01824 703483. The modern day CAB and its workings will feature in the next Town and Around!

Ty Mawr, Gwyddelwern

A revisit enjoyed by Heather Williams

It was lovely to visit Ty Mawr for our Social Event and talk before Christmas. However for those who missed this event here's a little resume about the history of this old building

The building lies on a road on which pilgrims and travellers have gone along since medieval times. People along the routes offered travellers lodgings on their long journeys. In this case, a local priest offered hospitality at 'The Great House', (Ty Mawr) - as it was first recorded. Over the centuries the house was extended and began to be established as an Inn. By the late 19th century it was known as the 'Crown'.

Modernisation has been carried out throughout the centuries. The building was refurbished around 1870 to reflect the fashionable Victorian period, with pebbledash and mortar then hiding its history. It retained this appearance until 1999 when it, a pub by then known as the 'Rose and Crown', was sold and totally renovated to reveal its historic character with all its lovely box framing and half timbering.

We now know, through dendrochronology (ring-tree dating), that the main part of the building dates back from 1570–2. In the bar area you can see the ornate diamond pattern framing that was once the end wall of the building. This was encased by the later Victorian wall and chimney – unearthed during the restoration of the building. A significant find was a 'jetton' or gaming token found in a crack above the beam above the main fireplace. It was dated back to 1521, and is identical to ones found on the Mary Rose when the ship was discovered on the seabed.

The Royal Commission for Ancient Buildings considered it the most important building to come to light for many years, the retention of early detail making it a building of exceptional interest.

RADCA awarded the Quayle Award to the owner of the building after the restoration, but unfortunately the pub, with its old name Ty Mawr again in use, closed after a short while. We are very pleased to see the building open for business again so if you didn't get inside for the RADCA event try and call in to see this splendid building.



Tree Cover in Wales' Towns and Cities

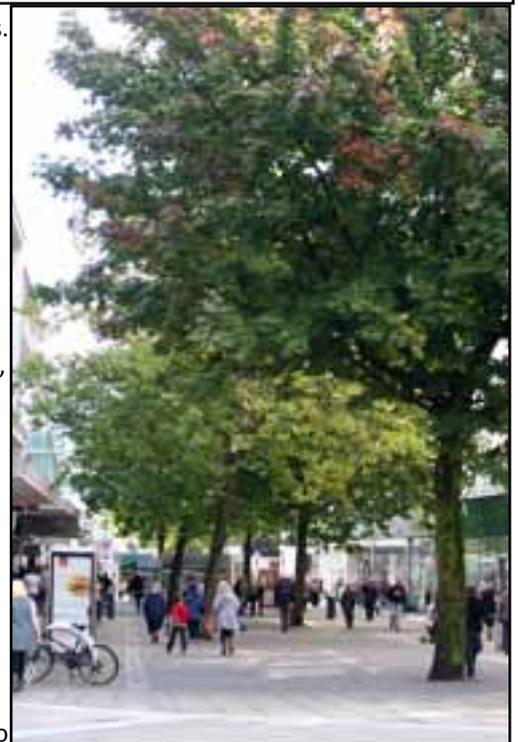
Heather Williams considers Ruthin's green canopy

Trees are powerful and versatile natural assets which have many different benefits. They help to create attractive towns, improve health and well-being, connect people with nature, remove pollutants and dust from the air, provide shade and cooling, provide a habitat for birds and insects – and even increase property values.

The importance of trees in the urban environment is, therefore, significant - and it is for this reason that an interesting survey has recently been conducted by Natural Resources Wales (NRW), in an attempt to help to understand more about the tree cover in towns and cities in Wales. Using nationwide aerial photography, NRW identified and mapped the leafy crown spread of the trees in our towns and cities. Wales is, in fact, the first country in the world to complete a survey of canopy cover in its urban area. NRW has now produced a fascinating report which, it hopes, will help a range of key groups and organisations plan and manage trees in urban areas in a better way.

Some interesting facts emerge from the study

- Town size has little effect on canopy area.
- Landscape character strongly influences existing tree cover – often low in coastal towns.
- 55 out of our 220 towns show an overall decline in canopy cover between 2006 and 2009.
- Some 11,000 large amenity trees were lost over 3 years, possibly due to increasing development pressure, or trees planted by the Victorians coming to the end of their lives.
- Just 1% of all tree cover is found in areas of high-density housing – often our



Photograph: Dafydd Fryer

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most deprived areas. Private residential gardens make up 34% of Wales' towns and cities - gardens provide 21% of all urban tree cover.

- Public open space hosts 46% of all tree cover in our communities despite making up only 20% of urban land. 27% of graveyards and cemeteries are covered by tree canopy.
- Transport routes (including verges and pavements) make up 23% of urban land but they have tree cover of only 8%. Motorised traffic causes much of the urban air and surface water pollution –which trees have the ability to remove.
- 44% of total canopy cover is provided by woodland, with 'amenity' trees accounting for the rest. Where high tree cover does occur at ward level, it's often attributed to areas of woodland. Such woodlands can sometimes be unmanaged and inaccessible.



Urban canopy cover in Wales was estimated at 16.9% in 2009 – mid-range in world rankings – with the total cover varying dramatically across the country. Denbighshire County recorded cover of 12.3% - which was similar to 13 other counties (22 counties in Wales). There was an interesting variation of tree cover within the county –high canopy cover recorded in Llangollen with 27.9% and St Asaph with 18.4%, whereas Denbigh had 8.6%, Rhuddlan had 7.4% and Rhyl had just 6%. Ruthin had 12% tree cover, and was not considered to be well-endowed. I found this a surprising fact as my impression is that the town has quite a lot of trees. We have the park at Cae Ddol, Ruthin Castle grounds and a significant number of trees at the schools in the town. In the 1990s the Civic Association was involved with tree planting schemes at local primary schools. But maybe it is the lack of trees in the streets, as well as gardens, which gives Ruthin a poor tree cover as compared to some other towns.

Denbighshire is one of the counties with the greatest canopy cover and tree loss over the three year survey period (2006-2009). Further work needs to be carried out in the county to examine why over 50% of the towns in Denbighshire show a decrease in canopy (and reflected tree count loss) - in particular in Ruthin, Rhuddlan, St Asaph and Denbigh.

Natural Resources Wales plans to build on the work which it has carried out and to promote a strategic approach to managing urban trees, and to planting more trees where they will deliver the greatest benefits. To this end NRW is committed to working with colleagues in the Welsh Government and in the public, third and private sector organisations throughout Wales. Urban trees are a shared responsibility and NRW hopes that by carrying out this study and disseminating the results local

communities will take an active part in making sure that trees are valued as a useful resource.

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So what can we do in Ruthin? In terms of the Civic Association, the Committee monitors planning applications. Some planning applications may be for the removal or works to trees included in a Tree Preservation Order or in a Conservation Area. Sometimes development is proposed which involves the removal of trees. Others may involve development which is too close to trees - which might ultimately lead to requests to fell trees. We obviously need to make appropriate comments on any of these applications affecting trees. Individual members can ensure that if trees do have to be felled (eg dangerous as dropping branches/reached their maturity), more suitable species are planted in their place. And of course, additional suitable trees can be planted in gardens – but not too close to the house!

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Ruthin and District Civic Association is determined to ensure that Open Heritage - Open Doors will happen in Ruthin this September. This is despite almost no funding being available, though we are grateful to Ruthin Town Council for generously supporting us financially yet again. Nevertheless to put on an interesting and innovative programme takes more than a lot of energy and enthusiasm, both of which we have, but publicity, brochures web sites etc all have to be paid for.

Calendar of dates for 2015

March 27th – Illustrated talk by authors, Arnold Hughes and Gareth Evans, “Ruthin’s Urban Evolution”. Following the publication of their ‘History of Ruthin’ they will talk about the book’s own history and a selection of its contents.

April 28th – The Hustings for the forthcoming Westminster elections will be held at Theatr John Ambrose, Ysgol Brynhyfryd. From 7.30pm all the prospective parliamentary candidates will be present to answer questions from the audience. This event is freely open to all members of the public.

June 26th – Local photographer, Peter Daniels invites members to “Look at images of Ruthin, 2005-2015” – digital images showing the many changes to our urban landscape great and small in our recent past. This will also be the occasion of the presentation of the Quayle Award.

September 26th and 27th – Ruthin’s Open Doors weekend. Despite minimal funding the association is determined to organise this festival of Open Heritage, ancient and modern. Operating as it has over the last ten-plus years. Open Doors will be welcoming free access to the public to some fascinating sites for yet another year.

October 22nd – The association’s AGM following which there will be an open presentation by Fflur Jones, Welsh National Assembly Outreach and Liaison officer on ‘Understanding and Engaging’.

There will also be published quarterly the association’s twelve page, illustrated, newsletter, Town and Around.

The Ruthin and District Civic Association welcome new membership that entitles members to participate in all the above events. Individual membership is £10 per person, joint membership £15. To become a member please contact our treasurer, Robert Williams at Lenton House, Mold Road, Ruthin, LL15 1SL, 01824 704998 or on ruthincivic@btinternet.com



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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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