

Quarterly comment & features from the Ruthin & District Civic Association

A Cause for Hope



Gavin Harris on Ruthin Future Week P4

Glyn Evans on Getting around Ruthin P5

We commend April's Ruthin Future Week which set out the Town Council's manifesto for change. Ambitious, certainly. Challenging, absolutely. Aspirational, definitely. Provocative, occasionally.

Market towns such as Ruthin face significant challenges. It is sometimes difficult to know how to react. Ruthin Future Week gave residents, businesses and organisations the opportunity to have a say in how the town could move forward.

The Civic Association played its part in the deliberations. How, then, should we respond to the key points put forward under Ruthin Future Week?

1. St Peter's Square

The pedestrianisation or part-pedestrianisation of St Peter's Square has been as long-standing aspiration of the Civic Association since its inception 30 years ago. Here should be a space which lends itself to events, markets, exterior café seating, etc.

Yet, the mediæval heart of the town and its conservation streetscape is dominated by cars, parked and moving, when it should be open to people. At times, it can be chaotic. Pedestrians find it difficult to cross the area. A number of vehicle movements are through rather than stopping in town. The

roundabout is not proportionate to the area.

The Town Council wishes to see the removal of the roundabout and the use of surfacing textures and colours to "channel" cars. It believes in the creation of a "sticky street" environment

in which residents and visitors spend more time.

We suggest that the proposals should be modified to explore the concept of "shared space" or "surfaces" which significantly reduces traffic speed (e.g. Y Maes, Caernarfon; Frodsham Street & especially railway station frontage square, Chester).

2. One-way Traffic

The Town Council believes that one-way traffic along upper Well Street, upper Market Street with existing Wynnstay Road will facilitate the improvements to the Square.

We say, in its favour, such a system would reduce through traffic, encouraging it on to Park Road. It could allow a coach drop-off. It could result in replacement on-street parking for spaces lost from the vicinity of the Square. This, however, would simply move rather than eradicate a problem of cars parked in a sensitive area (e.g. upper Well Street).

When the previous traffic study considered this, the concept of "shared space", above, was not sufficiently developed. Now that it is, shared space could offer a better solution for the Square, rather than more one-way streets.

The Town Council states that one-way streets slow traffic & creates pedestrian-friendly spaces. Experience both at Market Street during the gas works & from elsewhere suggests the opposite: traffic speeds increase and become pedestrian unfriendly. We therefore wonder whether shared space on the Square needs such a one-way system.

3. Old Courthouse (Nat West)

This would see the purchase of the former Nat West for community use. The Civic Association has previously supported this proposals (see Town and Around, December 2017, p3).

4. Town Hall

This under-used building is one we understand that the County Council wishes to declare as surplus. It seems at the heart of things that there is simply too much civic accommodation.

The proposals are for "multi-generational" use of the town hall, to replace the Scout hut and Drill Hall, thus freeing up space possibly for housing. We support this proposal.

We express concerns about the proposal to move the library to the Town Hall (see below).

We believe that there is a shortage of visitor accommodation in town and that the Town Hall may be used for that purpose.

5. Courthouse (Library Building)

The Civic Association feared that any transfer of the Library away from the existing building would result in a further empty heritage property. In making its case, the Civic Association felt that such a move would be acceptable were the existing library building to find a use. The proposal is to convert the building into a wedding venue but its use weekly during the Spring to Autumn, while admirable, is insufficient to guarantee the building's future. The type and location of the building might preclude its use for many things other than the Library.

CONTINUED ON P2

6. Future Housing Needs

The Town Council identified some half a dozen parcels of land within the town centre that could be used for accommodation, either new converted. The principle was to ensure that people continued to live in the town centre or within easy reach of it, as a way of ensuring vibrancy & sustainability, and minimising the requirement for motorised transport. This, we support. The areas considered were: Canol y Dre/Hen Lôn Parcwr • Awelon • Drill Hall • Scout hut • 46 Clwyd Street • Mount Street clinic. The Rhos Street school site could be residential especially for older people conveniently next to possible expanded medical facilities on the site.

One of these parcels could be used for visitor accommodation (if not the Town Hall) e.g. 46 Clwyd Street.

7. Safe Routes & Parc Clwyd

This would see the use of attractive green space to improve connections between the town centre, Cae Ddol and suburban areas.

It features the creation of a linear walk and park that connects the town centre and its southern and eastern communities and in particular Glasdir schools.

This would include improved public routes around the town's periphery (Station Walk, Park Road to Pont Howkin, with a spur through Canol y Dre). In its entirety, it would encourage walking and cycling and bring people to the town centre.

And St Peter's Church...

In parallel with its traditional role, the parochial church council (PCC) wants to try to refocus St Peter's as a community hub in which the wider community can meet. Social gatherings in a place of worship may not be to everyone's taste. But it would support the sustainability of one of our significant heritage buildings and we would urge the Town Council to work with the PCC on this.

Open Doors Success

Each year, Cadw produces a national report on Open Doors, writes **HEATHER WILLIAMS**. Here are some highlights from 2017's.

2017 was another fantastic year for the Wales Open Doors programme, with a record breaking number of events. Nationally, it featured 344 venues. 33 per cent of sites were normally closed to the public. Given that almost half of the country's Grade I listed buildings are churches or chapels, it isn't surprising that 35 per cent of the programme consisted of faith buildings (we have a significant number in the Ruthin and District Open Doors programme.)

A positive new development here at Town and Around

It's a time-consuming process, bringing you Town and Around. Cumulatively, there's the hours our writers put in. And the time it takes to stitch together all the contributions, squeezing them in.

Given this effort, we have off held lofty aspirations to make Town and Around more widely available.

A while back, once a year, we were even given to distribute the newsletter to each and every household in Ruthin. For our volunteers, that was also time-consuming and in any case grant funding which paid for the additional print run ceased long ago. We never addressed the inequity of leaving out our villages, none of which benefited from such a free distribution.

Your committee has, however, decided that it should again try to make make Town and Around as widely



available as possible. They wish to promote Town and Around more online—in the hope it will attract a younger readership. Printed copies will still find their way to members and be available while stocks last from Ruthin Library. Increasing our online presence, we hope, will widen the magazine's appeal and the debate about civic pride in the area. And, it's much less costly, in financial and volunteer terms.

For a trial period of one year, from this edition, we aim to have Town and Around on the web on a dedicated server at **townandaround.org.uk**. Rather than have to ferret through the Civic Association's own site, the new one will give quicker access. For those who know (or care) about such things, it will be in a faster-loading HTML format, although we will continue to provide a PDF version.

Please try to promote this new venture.

Write for Us

Meanwhile, if you know of a burning issue you feel deserves attention, why not consider putting an article or letter together for Town and Around. Contact details are available on the rear. The more contributions we receive, the better. And it minimises the stress on the production team when it comes to press day!

Archive & Index

As time permits, we are extending the archive of earlier copies of Town and Around. So far, we have digitised 2012's to add to the archive, which now covers 2012 to 2018. To accompany this, we will shortly have an index to help locate specific articles in previous additions.

More developments next quarter, available towards the end of August 2018.

Incredibly, Denbighshire accounted for 31 per cent of the national programme—the highest amount of any county—thanks to all the volunteer effort in Ruthin and district and also in neighbouring Denbigh.

In terms of national feedback, mention was made of some properties which were included in the Ruthin & District programme. Highlights include the response from Denbighshire Archives, Ruthin: "We were really pleased with the event overall, particularly as it was the first time [we had] done anything like this" (a vintage theme with various stallholders). The English Presbyterian Church in Ruthin was also mentioned, with its positive comments, "As a church, we were very pleased with the

visitors to our event and the opportunity to welcome everyone along".

In terms of 2018, Cadw hopes to encourage more properties to open which have benefited from Cadw grant aid. It also hopes to increase the number of sites not normally open by 10 per cent year-on-year. It also hopes to improve the Cadw website to make it easier to use.

Work is in progress planning this year's programme and we will bring you full details in the next edition, available in late August.

Open Doors 2018 dates are September 8th/9th (Ruthin) and 15th/16th (the district)

Sadness & a Cause of Concern



by K R DANIELS

Speak to the proprietrix of Siop Nain and it becomes very clear from the outset how upset she is at her decision in March to close her café. Rebecca Cobbett Rayment has worked here for over 15 years and during the last five has run it, after the Davies retired. She's tried to modernise the business. The café employed nine people. Little wonder, then, that she feels let down.

Siop Nain isn't the first café to close in recent times. A report in the April 2007 edition of *Town & Around* suggested that there were about a dozen cafés in Ruthin at that time. Today, we're down to our last five, if you include the Craft Centre. That's a significant reduction. The backdrop to Siop Nain's closure is therefore a shrinking sector, with fewer competitors. The fact that we can support fewer cafés may say something about the relative wealth of the town.

In terms of the café's closure, the owner blames the reduction in town centre footfall over the last two years. This, she squarely says, became acute after the Nat West Bank shut. Those who need face-to-face banking have to travel elsewhere and, when they do, they also shop elsewhere. And, if they do that, self-evidently, they will not patronise Ruthin's cafés. She is not at all shy in stating that between May and November 2017, the first summer season at the time of the Nat West closure, Siop Nain's turnover was down £15,000.

She feels that April's Barclay's Bank closure has further weakened Ruthin's position relative to its neighbour Mold. She herself is now directly affected: she transferred her own business account from Nat West to Barclay's, only to find that Barclay's, too, has abandoned the town. Over the summer, this could mean two trips a week to Mold just to bank takings—or face queueing at the Post Office of up to six times longer than in the bank, she reckons. Either way, this will become unacceptable and it won't be just her business that will suffer.

If the HSBC closes—as she feels it surely will—then there will be no cash machine in town. Those who need it will have to visit either the Co-op, Tesco or Bridge Services—all of which are outside the town centre and all of which, Rebecca believes,

will likely result in reduced town trade.

There is no doubt that Costa's has also had an impact on Siop Nain. Rebecca says that Costa "should never have been allowed", although we aren't sure that the planning system is there to regulate the market.

What this could indicate is that there are changing tastes in the way we drink and snack. Interestingly, in spite of its rock-bottom coffee prices, Rebecca doesn't blame Wetherspoon's, in spite of the way its cheap lunches must have challenged Siop Nain's own.

And, she believes, there's further evidence of changes in tastes. Older school pupils are now less inclined to come into town to buy food at Siop Nain (or elsewhere), as they once did. Instead, they seem to prefer a cheaper "meal deal" at Tesco.

As regards the visitor economy, she also blames parking. In recent years, there has been quite a debate about this but the Civic Association has never waded in. In truth, no one likes to pay for parking but tourists who travel anywhere these days tend to factor it into their stay—they expect to pay for it—so we are unsure how relevant this is.

Could it also be that there are wider issues at play? A town councillor said that negativity on social media may not have helped Siop Nain. If true, this is perhaps a lesson for the town in terms of its image. Social media are a double-edged sword.

It's worth noting, though, that there was a significant outpouring of social media support for Rebecca when she announced her decision to close. This is not surprising, given the uniqueness of the building, the business' long-standing nature, regular clientèle and its position off the Square.

Indeed, it was a sad moment for everyone.

Our main concern as a Civic Association must be that Siop Nain is something of a litmus test regarding the health of our town. The closure, above all else, is a symptom of the upheaval associated with significant social change.

If a business established nearly 50 years can be shaken to this degree, what else might happen?

Long-standing Ruthin Business—and Unique Heritage Building

In 1973, Harold Humphreys sold Siop Nain to an architect, the late Ken Flavell. Flavell will be known to long-standing members of the Civic Association.

Flavell bought the business for £10,000. At the time, this was the card shop site, with the current adjoining café middle room used as a store. Then, the third room and its first floor were let as a private residence, with an alley entrance off Well Street.

Colin & Jill Davies bought the business in 1976. Reflecting Flavell's investment by including the café, by now it was worth £21,500. Much of the internal fittings still date from Flavell's time. The Davieses ran the business successfully for over 35 years and during that time it was the popular venue for locals and visitors alike. The Davieses still live over the shop.

Both Flavell and the Davieses were among those who promoted the town's Mediæval Wednesdays.

15 years ago, the current proprietress became involved in the business, working for the Davieses, and she took it over five years ago. She converted the former printers to the café's rear into holiday accommodation and she established a small tea garden.

The grade II listed building dates from 1490 and is an example of one of our best. Its timber-framed frontage is only part of its heritage. Here in 1850 was printed the first copies of the National Anthem.

The closed portion of the building has mercifully again been leased, though not as a café in the form that we know it.

Meanwhile, the Siop Nain card & gift shop continues to trade as normal.

The good news as far as the town is concerned is that, at the time of writing, lessors have let the café as a separate business and conversion work within has started. We understand that this will completely change the nature of the premises and that it will sell pizza.

What, then, does Rebecca think the town should do in order to prevent more problems such as hers?

First, she says, we need to invite people in. It needs to be easy to get here and to park. Secondly, she says that we could benefit from an outdoor market in town, like Mediæval Wednesdays of 30-40 years ago. Interestingly, among others, it was Siop Nain's owner at the time who promoted the idea. The irony then, of course, was that generally the town itself wasn't especially supportive. Thirdly, we need to address the issue of the number of declining banks. And, fourthly, businesses need not compete against each other.

People Participation in Ruthin



GAVIN HARRIS looks back over a successful week considering the town's future

In 2011, the people of Ruthin participated in Ruthin Future, a programme of events and consultations that listened to their views and ideas for the town as part the award winning "Ruthin Market Town of the Future" initiative about shaping the town for the future. It was a Beacon for Wales project and in 2012 won a prestigious Action for Market Towns Award, and now forms the template for National Place Planning exercises across Wales.

Ruthin Town Council, with support from Denbighshire County Council and other partners, are now embarking on Ruthin Future 2, an update of the plan to help the town face new challenges such as finding viable uses for vacant bank buildings, increasing town centre footfall and ensuring a sustainable future for the facilities and amenities the town offers for its community.

A key part of the initiative is to look at some locations and buildings which are potentially impacted by once-in-a-generation change and which, through open and transparent discussion involving different partners, can allow fresh ideas and opportunities to be identified which maximise the potential for re-use, development and improvement for the benefit of Ruthin.

The discussion so far has involved representatives from public organisations such as Denbighshire's Assets Management team, Ruthin Town Council, private house builders and developers, local community organisations, housing associations,

local landowners, urban designers & architects, and representatives from the Ruthin community, not least the Civic Association. Consultation has taken place through a number of events held as part of Ruthin Future Week, as well as the continuing Ruthin Future Exhibition at Ruthin Craft Centre.

Ruthin Future Week 2

Ruthin Future week started on Sunday April 22nd, with a Picturehaus Film Club dinner and film showing of "Earth—One Amazing Day" at manorhaus Ruthin, from which proceeds raised went towards the initiative, with £300 raised on the night.

On Monday April 23rd, Ruthin Town Council held an ordinary meeting and, while all meetings are open to the public, invitations were issued specifically to local schools to encourage attendance.

The meeting agenda included items relevant to the Ruthin Future Week and valuable contributions were made by students of the local schools in particular, to discussions about Youth Club and activities provision in the town.

On Tuesday April 24th, the Ruthin Future Exhibition opened at Ruthin Craft Centre, and has since been visited by many hundreds of people who have contributed their own ideas, thoughts and comments through comment forms, model tags and by using a sticker traffic light system to express their likes and dislikes of ideas presented. The exhibition has now been extended to run until the end of May 2018.

Wednesday April 25th saw over 30 representatives from numerous public, private and third sector organisations attend the Ruthin Summit, which used workshop and presentation techniques

to draw out the various opinions and contributions of those present, in order to allow these to be better understood and then feed into the ongoing development of the Ruthin Future Masterplan.

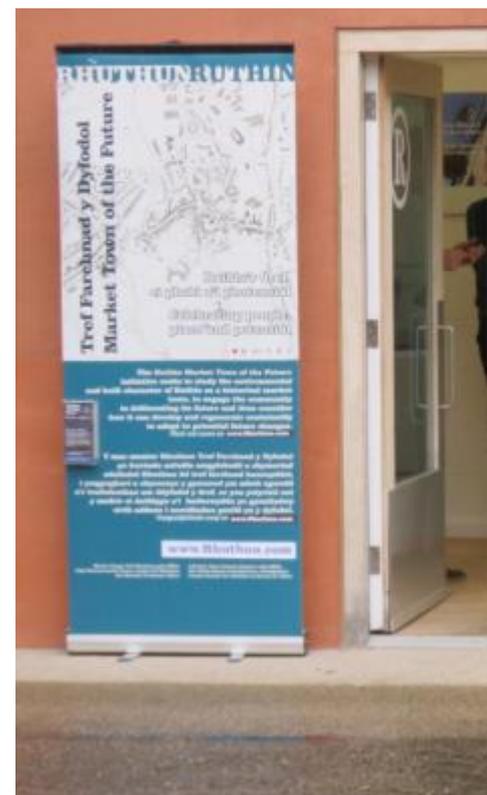
On Thursday April 26th, members of the Ruthin business community gathered at Ruthin Craft Centre to hear about plans for a strategic marketing plan for Ruthin, and to have an opportunity to visit and contribute to the Ruthin Future Exhibition.

The evening concluded with an inspiring presentation by Jim Jones of North Wales Tourism about the developing tourism economy of North Wales and how Ruthin is well placed to benefit.

Another fundraising event took place on Friday 27th April at manorhaus Ruthin, with a dinner with proceeds in aid of the initiative. In total, £600 was raised which will ensure the initiative has been fully funded and a surplus put towards developing some of the ideas.

The final weekend included very popular historical guided tours of the town by Heather Williams & Roger Edwards and then, on Sunday, in excess of 60 people took part in the Ruthin Mini-photomathon: four hours to take six images around Ruthin based on six themes, with 40 entries then judged by award winning photographer Don Jackson-Wyatt.

Information gathered from the events and ongoing exhibition comments etc. will be used to inform the development of the town Masterplan and to prioritise projects that Ruthin Town Council seek to progress.



Getting about Ruthin

As the community again considers its future, Ruthin resident and Sustrans area manager GLYN EVANS reflects on recent changes and suggests how we might improve our environment

Back in 2012, I was asked to write a piece for Town and Around as there were a number of transport related issues going on within the town. I was recently asked to provide a bit of an update on how things had or hadn't changed within the last few years, especially in terms of how pedestrians and cyclists are considered.

The organisation I work for is often labelled as the "cycling charity" but it is more to do with "people and places" than a single form of transport. Ruthin is a relatively small town, no more than 1½ miles across as the crow flies in any direction, yet most of us drive around the town to do our errands, drop the kids off at school or just to pick up a newspaper from the Co-op. It's easy to drive around the town and there is ample free or cheap parking available, whatever you read on Facebook! It also seems to be perfectly acceptable to park on any pavement or across any junction without any thought! But walking and cycling on a regular basis have huge benefits in terms of our health, the local economy and environmental issues such as air quality.

In 2012, Denbighshire County Council was proposing a number of changes to traffic flows and additional parking provision in and around the town centre, none of which included improvements for pedestrians, cyclists or those with pushchairs or mobility scooters. One-way systems around the town would have increased the speed of traffic and made the environment less inviting for those using the narrow footways and crossings on St Peter's Square or along Well Street. Fortunately, those plans were shelved, hopefully binned, but there still hasn't been any improvements to the footways in the same area.

The central area of Ruthin has a number of very narrow pavements where it is not possible for two pedestrians to pass without one of them having to step into the road and it's a real shame that improvements haven't been made to widen these footways and prioritise people. There would be an added benefit that traffic is slowed and in general the whole environment would be improved.

Or should we think even bigger and look to reduce or remove traffic altogether from some parts of the Square? During the recent gas pipe upgrade works, a number of roads were closed or temporarily blocked, and walking up and down Well Street every day was a joy



75 years ago: how attitudes change. "Safety on our roads can only be achieved by strict segregation... of the various classes of road users. Fast traffic must be segregated from slow, and pedestrians & pedal cyclists from both", J A Gouch, President, Institution of Highway Engineers, 1943

and felt much safer knowing that no speeding traffic was going to come hurtling around the bend by the Manor House. Businesses need access and so we shouldn't prevent vehicles entirely, but what about a 'build out' near Williams Estate that would improve the crossing point while also slowing traffic? Then on the Square, footways could be widened and crossing points improved, traffic would be slowed to walking pace and that community feeling that we get during Top Dre or New Year's Eve would be a regular occurrence.

In much the same way as Ruthin Future Week, Llangollen Town Council recently invited Ben Hamilton Bailey (a renowned urban/shared space designer) to look at how the streets in the centre could be made more people friendly while also accommodating the (significant volumes of) traffic that passes through and they are now moving forward with a more detailed study to investigate the options.

The centre of Ruthin has far less through traffic and so I am sure there would be a happy compromise to be had here as well. The idea of "shared space" is worth pursuing.

In other areas, away from the town centre, there have been a number of walking and cycling improvements that should be celebrated. The path to Rhewl is now a regular route for walkers, joggers and cyclists (remember the old narrow overgrown footway?) and improved connections to the rear of Tesco's or through Erw Goch all make walking and cycling that little bit easier.

The work is far from over yet, as we still

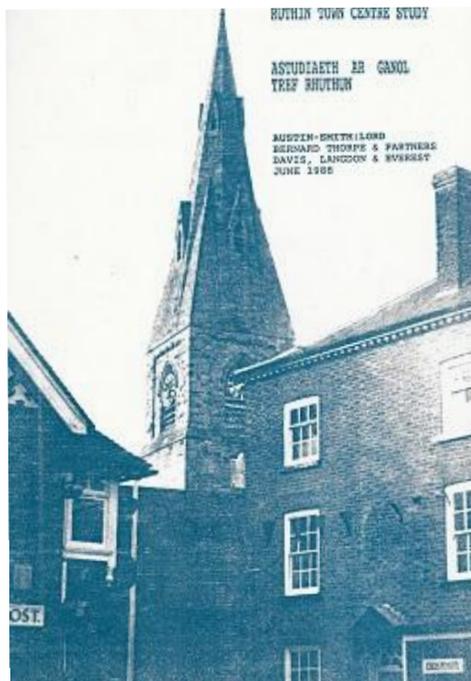
have steps at the rear entrance to Brynhyfryd, crossing the Bric Roundabout is far from easy and the Glasdir estate still doesn't have a direct connection pedestrian to the town centre.

And what about direct access to the new school campus to the north of the town? This marvellous facility will benefit the young people of our town for many years, but the site has been over three years in the planning and construction phases, yet there is still no direct access to Park Road, the town centre and beyond to the residential areas where a large number of pupils live. The 160 space car park at the school was finished on time. What kind of message is that to the behaviour of our future generations?

Since I last wrote a piece for Town and Around, there have been two important pieces of legislation passed in Wales. The Active Travel Act, a world first, requires local authorities to plan and map out how their walking and cycling networks should look, as opposed to putting in paths where they fit. The Future Generations Act requires central and local government to consider the impacts of its actions on any of its work on our future generations. It means proper long-term planning in a sustainable way.

So perhaps it's the time to reconsider how we use our public spaces and put people first. The changes of use with some of the buildings on the Square could be the catalyst for wider environmental changes that will benefit this town for the future. Wide areas to walk and safely cross the larger streets that converge on this wonderful setting, as well as planters, space for markets, suitable street furniture to allow residents and visitors alike to relax and enjoy the area would surely be something for which our future generations would give us thanks.

The 1988 Ruthin Town Centre Study



As we watch the emergence of the Masterplan 2, 30 years ago this month Austin Smith Lord published its Ruthin Town Centre Study. This was the focus of the first proper meeting of the Civic Association. PETER DANIELS considers the plan and its impact

Till the 1988 Austin Smith Lord development plan, no one had been thinking strategically about Ruthin and its direction & needs. Jointly sponsored by three stakeholders, the plan was designed to cement a new consensus regarding the town's future. The partners were Clwyd County & Glyndwr District Councils and the Welsh Development Agency (all of which, of course, are no longer with us).

The main objectives of the study were to provide new facilities for commercial & social benefit; generate income; resolve traffic and parking issues; and to enhance the environment of the town.

Plans such as these never totally come to complete fruition, not as originally intended. In a sense, they are a focus for discussion, a foundation or a set of principles. Some elements of the study were dropped, while others were modified. The 1988 plan did, however, set the seeds of change for the 1990s and even into the early 2000s.

The report looked at seven principal sites within the town centre: the town hall &

slaughterhouse; the county offices at that point occupied by Glyndwr Council; the gasworks; the car park on the opposite side of the road to the Craft Centre; land at the junction of Park Road & Canol y Dre; and both the upper and lower agricultural markets.

The main impetus was to move the agricultural markets from the town centre although, at the time, the site owners had not expressed a wish to go. This would nevertheless unlock development potential. The markets brought with them significant local traffic problems, including ever-longer stock wagons. Between 1983 and 1988, throughput at the market had increased by 60 per cent and it was anticipated to grow at a further five per cent per annum for the foreseeable future. Planners felt that the markets needed room to expand and the report favoured three potential sites, at Lôn Cae Bricks; the junction of Park Road/Canol y Dre; or the junction of Lôn Fawr & Mwrog St.

Any such move released land at the lower market for redevelopment. In fact, it was envisaged that this retail development would not only fund the market's move but it would result in ensuring the "long-term viability of the mart and of the town centre".

That redevelopment would retain two faces of the county offices (today's County Hall frontage on Market Street &

Wynnstay Road); demolish the rear buildings, outliers and "temporary" (actually by then semi-permanent) accommodation; and see new Glyndwr offices at the Old Station Yard roundabout (now named the Bricc roundabout), occupying the old gasworks site.

Recognising that the town had no significant supermarket, the redeveloped lower mart site would have an anchor grocer and, interestingly, an arcade of additional shops with it. The report conceded that Ruthin's catchment was insufficient to attract a "main retailer", although in 2006 this was turned on its head when Tesco developed land off Lôn Parcwr which in 1988 was earmarked for housing.

The market did move in 1992 (to Glasdir), when Argyll Stores (Properties) Ltd purchased the lower market for the construction of a Lo-Cost supermarket (the current Co-op). There were no associated smaller shop units built. Smith Austin Lord called for the development to have a "strong architectural identity". Readers will have their own views as to whether the design with its unscreened delivery bay achieved this. The Association called it an "architectural and planning mess".

The 1988 study suggested that the



1 Supermarket and two rows of shop units leading from Wynnstay Rd. 2 New Glyndwr offices. 3 Remodelled Clwyd offices. 4 Proposed housing. 6/7 Craft market. 8 Proposed health centre. 9 Proposed craft workshops. 11 Proposed car park

old Market Hall, Town Hall & slaughterhouse site should be converted into craft workshops, thus re-enforcing the principle of Ruthin being a hub for crafts allied to the Craft Centre. This never came to pass.

It was suggested that the upper agricultural market adjacent to Market Street car park should become a new health centre. This would replace outdated facilities. In reality, the Market Street/Mount Street general practice alone relocated to the gasworks site as Plas Meddyg. This location was initially designed for Glyndwr's offices and was never developed as intended. It was only from 2003 when the new Denbighshire rebuilt and remodelled its council offices.

What impact did the eventual part-development have on Ruthin? From 1992, post-Lo-Cost, the town at last had a larger supermarket, even though it was not one in the premier league. Some town centre grocers and other convenience retailers closed but there is no doubt that the mart area was improved environmentally.

The agricultural mart's move from the town centre in 1992 allowed it to modernise and, in particular, expand into one of Wales' major markets, something that was impossible in its previous substandard and split locations.

One unintended consequence was a drop in town footfall, as farmers or their accompanying wives no longer took to town on Thursdays & Fridays. No longer was it so easy for visitors to watch the auctions.

Ruthin gained a modern medical facility (subsequently extended), even though the Austin Smith Lord study envisaged this on Market Street. Instead, Glyndwr extended Market Street car park in 1993.

The remaining changes occurred after new Denbighshire considered its own development proposals for Ruthin, in the early 21st century.

Quotes from the 1988 study

" The presence of housing in and close to the commercial centre of the town is an important element in the character of the Ruthin townscape

"

" The major visitor attractions in Ruthin are the Craft Centre and the weekly Mediæval Fairs held during the tourist season

"

Seen in Passing...

Till Wetherspoon's renovated it, the Castle Hotel appeared often in the pages of Towns & Around, consequent upon the state of the building's fabric. Now altogether much better, we still feel compelled to point out that a persistent leak in the downpipe to the left of the main entrance is rotting the brickwork around it. This extends to the door itself. Redolent of the bad old days, it's nevertheless unlike Wetherspoon's to need prompting.



In 2017, a significant number of commercial & residential town centre buildings were painted up. But this brings into sharp focus the state of several other buildings. Sue Ryder, for example, has peeling masonry & its door paintwork is flaking badly. Chief among them is the suite of shops at the top of Clwyd Street, starting with the Children's Society, which all now need urgent attention in terms of woodwork and plaster. Is there any chance landlords can redecorate and repair? As if to heed this wish, on May

8th came scaffolding on one of these properties, no. 3D which itself is looking fine again but alas! none of the other three units are currently being treated.



Meanwhile, within one of the above-mentioned buildings on Clwyd Street, a shop empty for who can remember how long, there appears to be some activity within and outside. The window covering was removed, the internal area tidied up and new heaters & flooring introduced.

On the door to St Peter's Church reads a sign advising visitors that their movements may now be monitored, including possibility by CCTV. This follows recent incidents of anti-social behaviour within the church building.

Seen in Passing continued on P11

The Machine Showcases some "Local" Artists

On page 12, we consider that books as well as buildings are part of our heritage. Art, especially public art, is similarly an expression of that heritage: witness Ruthin's Art Trail and, especially, the Craft Centre for the Applied Arts. Art asks us to look a little closer, a little deeper at our everyday environment.

It may not be public art per se but Carl Ringwood Walker who in September 2017 opened a framing shop & gallery at The Machine, Well Street, promises a rotating display of local artists' and photographers' work, in one of his two windows.

There are few opportunities in town, these days, to view original works and his initiative, even though on a modest scale, is very much to be welcomed.

You may not chose to buy but that doesn't stop you window shopping.

"Local" does not necessarily mean Ruthin & district. That would be restrictive. The artists he wishes to showcase do, however, come from the Vale or nearby. In April, there was work on show from Keith Hall of Rhuddlan and from well known local artist Mary Cunnah, late of Llanfair DC and now living at Llansilin, Powys.

On display, then, was a print of St Peter's Square painted from the less usual north, looking towards the Old Courthouse and Castle Street. There were two views of the Vale of Clwyd and one of Nant Francon, Caernarfon. (At the opposite end of the "local" scale, within, is juxtaposed a framed print of Middle Earth, no less).

In May came a change, after which Ringwood Walker displayed the vibrant colours of Annie Lloyd.



Lick of Paint for School Designed on Fag Packet



Did you know that Ysgol Brynhyfryd's three-storey 1950s building facing Mold Road was basically drawn up as a doodle? It's a lovely thought and it takes us way back to the days before computer aided design. Not on a cigarette packet, admittedly, but scribbled instead across the masthead of a daily newspaper. How so? This from Wrexham's Save our Heritage (SOH) website regarding historic Denbighshire's 1950s County Architect, Gilbert Wiles,

"He would catch the bus from Garden Village to the office in the centre of Wrexham. During this bus ride, he would sketch details and ideas for buildings in the design phase, along the top edge of his newspaper. Upon his arrival in work, he would tear off the top of his newspaper and hand it to a draughtsman to turn into a proper plan. Ysgol Brynhyfryd in Ruthin was designed almost entirely in this fashion".

According to Gwynne Morris's book published to commemorate Brynhyfryd's 1999 centenary, the school officially opened this proud monument to modern education in 1954.

Brynhyfryd's mentioned on the SOH website is because it was Wiles who also designed Wrexham's Grove Park School, also in the art deco style, also around the same time as our own school and probably, too, on his daily newspaper.

It is to safeguard the Grove Park buildings that SOH—which includes our sister organisation the Wrexham Area Civic Society—was formed. To précis the SOH website, the Wrexham education re-organisation of 2003 was designed to release surplus capacity. The council thus wished to sell the valuable Grove Park site for redevelopment. Someone discovered that there was a covenant on the site which restricted it for educational purposes only. The process ground to a halt, during which time campaigners managed to have the building listed.

Of course, back home, Brynhyfryd's building doesn't need saving. The school moves from strength to strength. Indeed, Ysgol Brynhyfryd's has seen much better times. Again, from the SOH website,

"Around the same time that Wiles was working on the Grove Park School, he was also planning a new co-educational building for Ysgol Brynhyfryd in Ruthin. Fortunately, [the school] has seen fit to keep the building in good condition and, when it required refurbishment, the windows chosen were of the correct type and colour".

How very true. Over the Easter holidays 2018, the school has painted up this frontage and it now looks splendid. It may not be a structure to which we usually pay particular attention but its symmetry and simplicity are, in their own way, as

striking as the more classical design of Ruthin School opposite. In fact, given Brynhyfryd's importance to Ruthin and district, much more so.

Enough of the bouquets. Sadly, the school also gets a brickbat. There is one corner of Brynhyfryd that is in a sorry state and needs the school's attention. It is most visible to traffic entering Ruthin via Mold Road. We refer to the lodge at the school's entrance. So visible is it, in fact, that the "temporary" fencing surrounding it acts as a useful frame for banners which advertise the school's successes. Whether this is allowable or not we aren't sure but we should perhaps turn a blind eye, because it does promote the school and it diverts interest away from the lodge itself. For the lodge is now in a state, with slates lately missing & an alarming crack again appearing.



Back to Wiles, the other fascinating fact about his commute to work was that he took the bus. Brynhyfryd is a testament to the way he used his commute well. You can't design a school building while driving a car! And, yes, Gilbert Wiles was the son of Walter Wiles, also County Architect for historic Denbighshire. Walter designed the frontage of the County Offices—now County Hall—opened in 1909 and still with us today.

New Schools make the Right Statement

The new schools at Glasdir came into use on April 10th. They replaced those on the former Rhos Street school site which, we're told, was in continuous use for 172 years. Are the new buildings designed to last as long? The more likely question is, will we need primary or indeed any school buildings in the year 2190?

Ultimately, the two schools need to be fit for purpose—and construction delays

meant that Civic Association members were unable to judge this for themselves, the promised guided tour having been cancelled. But the site also needs to add to the Ruthin built environment, which it does admirably.

Indeed, Denbighshire County Council and its architects are to be congratulated for the design of the new buildings and of the site in general. The star-shaped layout, the proportionate height, the stone facing, the central climbing roofline with, from certain angles, its glimpse of St Peter's church and the subtle olive of the pitched roofs all give the building an appropriately contemporary feel. The scale is suitable and pleasing. We like the way that the Council empurpled part of the roof & cladding to distinguish Ysgol Pen Barras from the blue of the Rhos Street portion. The landscaping appears good and well considered.

Car parking grounds are rarely the most pleasing parts of any construction and, fortunately here, it's tucked away to the rear and this means passing pedestrians, cyclists & motorists get a view of the buildings and not the parking lot.

There will be regret from those of us older people who will mourn the closure of the former site, especially if we went there. For some, the two-storey Rhos Street was never appealing and, here, the new site scores immeasurably over the old (and not just in accessibility, all on one floor).

The new looks much less severe; the old seemed threatening. Educationally, our youngsters deserve nothing less than the new. And why shouldn't the rest of us benefit from a strong yet warm design.

In terms of access, all we need is the promised upgrade of the footpath from Park Road via the football pitches.

The star-shaped layout looks most impressive from on high



Celebrating Success



PETER DANIELS reflects on 10 years of the Craft Centre

It took 16 months to complete. The project cost in total was £4.3m. It was the biggest single investment in craft space in North Wales. It opened 10 years ago. And it's here, in Ruthin.

We're talking about our rebuilt Craft Centre, which celebrates in style this summer, with an exhibition by Andrew Logan, who's presentation opened the Centre's first year. Three of his pieces currently on view were also on display in 2008.

In 2008, as the new Craft Centre opened, local opinion was divided. Letters in the Free Press were critical of the building's design. Locally, there were comments about the site looking more like a factory than an art space. We had to turn to both the BBC and Telegraph for a much more enthusiastic response.

Said the Telegraph, "In Sergison Bates's hands [the architects], it has acquired a poetic relationship both to the landscape in which the building sits and to the use that it supports" and as "strikingly modern reworking of the site that lifts up its eyes to the hills and makes a bold connection with the surrounding country".

10 years on and the building in its rippled, sandstone-coloured concrete is as natural to us in Ruthin as the surrounding hills that its roofline is said to imitate. Back then, what was all the fuss about?

Surely, people did not prefer the old design. This opened in 1982, at the height of the early 1980s interest in craft centres, thanks to the vision of Clwyd County Council's then chief executive, Haydn Rees who, at Mold, built his

campus of shire hall, theatre & law courts. Fortunately, he decided to place the craft centre in Ruthin.

A quarter of a century later, no one could afford to maintain this dilapidated 1970s design. In any case, there seemed to be little imagination in its blocky, lacklustre appearance: it was even said it could be adapted to sheltered housing, if it failed.

It may have taken a while for us to grow fond of the new centre. 10 years on, however, and it's an established part of the landscape. It's very different from its predecessor. The new was more eye-catching, fanciful, playful even, with its flying archway, warmth and courtyard with a continental feel. The building design was second in the 2009 Art Fund Prize. It won RIBA's 2009 Dewi Prys Thomas design award which "recognises the importance of good design to the quality of life, identity and regeneration of Wales" (and other recipients had been the Senedd and the National Botanic Garden).

The new features fewer units, and these are now used in a more diverse way, for example, 'show & tell' exhibitions. With the internet as a means of selling craft & art, the need for retail workshops has much diminished.

As good and important as the building is, its main purpose is to get people inside it. Within are three galleries rather than the single one of old. The main gallery is considerably bigger than the 1982 single gallery-cum-shop that was able to take just half of any touring exhibition. Within the new, it is the use of

natural light that makes the Craft Centre so special. And, a second design feature is, given its proximity to the A494 and the Old Station Yard Roundabout, traffic noise in the galleries is non-existent.

In 10 years, it has shown over 120 exhibitions. As one of only a few British galleries displaying craft in all media, it's less about whether you like a piece or an exhibition but more about trying to understand the passion beyond the craft on display and its narrative. Increasingly, these days, it's also an opportunity to get your hands dirty and even in using some of the items you see. The centre also now specialises in education, events, 'having a go', messy play, show & tell and in displaying students' work from local schools and colleges. Its management has also developed important relationships with artists and this has resulted in some stunning displays.

If you think about it, it's remarkable that Ruthin, a town of barely 6,000, should feature such a nationally and indeed internationally celebrated Centre for the Applied Arts.

As for its impact on the area, the Craft Centre sees between 60,000 and 70,000 visits per annum, bringing people into the Vale. The café tenants blamed a decreasing footfall for the restaurant's nine-month closure. Now in Denbighshire's own hands, Ruthin's largest café has gone from strength to strength, as in the summer sunshine it spills out into the centre's courtyard.

Getting visitors from the Craft Centre into Ruthin nevertheless remains a challenge and here the Art Trail certainly hasn't hindered. There remains a core of locals who support the Centre and its activities.



Deputy director Jane Gerrard & exhibitor Andrew Logan

Memorial to Fallen Heroes

As we approach the centenary of the end of the First World War, it is only right to look back on how our forebears in Ruthin went about remembering those who had fallen in the line of duty, writes D GWYNNE MORRIS

It does not make for pleasant reading when one realises how long it took for the Memorial in Wynnstay Road to be erected and blessed. What follows here is only a part of the story but I hope it will give the reader a glimpse of the history behind its long delayed installation.

This short article will only be part of a very lengthy journey. The war ended on the eleventh hour of the eleventh month of 1918. 16 days later, on the November 27th, a letter was read to Ruthin Town Council from Mrs Cornwallis West of Ruthin Castle, offering to erect at her own expense a shrine to the memory of Ruthin's fallen soldiers. The Council gratefully accepted and thanked Mrs West for her generous offer but no subsequent mention of this ever appeared. The movement thus initiated took seven years to bring to fruition.

Ruthin Town Council met on January 8th, 1919, with the Mayor (Councillor W. Godfrey Lecomber, whose youngest son Philip had been killed on March 27th, 1918 and had been recommended for the Victoria Cross) presiding. When the matter of a memorial was raised, Councillor W H Williams suggested that they consider the erection of a new Town Hall—he considered the present building to be too small, holding only about 400 people, whereas neighbouring towns possessed halls seating 1,500! Other

ideas, such as that put forward by Councillor James Jones who advocated the purchase of a field known as "The Bull Croft" to be laid out ornamentally. This field was behind the County Offices in Market Street. He envisaged this as an attraction to visitors, with bowling greens, croquet and tennis courts. The suggestion was well received and the Council appointed a committee to consider whether to provide a memorial and the form it should take.

A poorly attended public meeting was held on February 6th, 1919, when Mr J C Davies, then the Director of Education, wanted a memorial to promote the health of the people. There was evidence of deterioration in people's conditions, doubtless due to the war, and he supported the Mayor's suggestion that swimming baths should be provided. Many disagreed and said that as Ruthin was not industrialised, baths were not needed. A new Town Hall with a museum and reading room would be better.

Mrs Springman, however, pointed out that the hospital, which belonged to the Ruthin Union and which had been used by the Red Cross during the war, was about to be closed. This should be purchased and made into a Free Hospital under the management of three local doctors.

Mr Ellis Williams, a hairdresser who had

himself served in the war and was now a Councillor, emerged as a spokesman for the ex-servicemen. Many felt that a memorial should be erected on the Square, behind the Peers Memorial clock tower where it would serve as a constant reminder. Another suggestion was that a tree for every soldier should be planted on the streets. Also, surviving soldiers should be granted the Freedom of the Borough. Others suggested the restoration of the Moel Famau Tower and the renovation of the Llanrhydd Almshouses.

This seemed to be the end of the matter. No more progress was made for the next TWO YEARS! In March 1921, a petition was received by the Council

expressing the concern of the townspeople at the lack of progress and that the matter of the memorial had been dropped. Even then, it was not until the following year, in April 1922, that another public meeting was convened.

At that meeting it was disclosed that a Mr Harold Hughes, the Bangor Diocesan architect, an authority on Celtic crosses, had prepared plans for a monument to be erected in "New Street" [Wynnstay Road] which would be viewed against the Cwydian range as a

backdrop.

Many approved, but the majority wanted it on the Square, a choice strongly advocated by Councillor Ellis Williams and the ex-servicemen. The main reasons against were that it would be dwarfed by the St. Peter's Church spire and the Peers Memorial clock, which would have to be removed. The traditional fairs and markets would not be appropriate neighbours, whereas the quiet dignity of Wynnstay Road would be ideal. The meeting adjourned for a week.

At the resumed meeting Mr Meiric Roberts, a local tailor, tradesman, councillor and ex-serviceman, proposed a compromise that Mrs Williams of Crown House be approached regarding the purchase of the Bull Croft. She had declined to do this on a previous occasion and she declined again. Meanwhile, other parts of the Square were considered, such as an area of land in front of the 'Old Court House'. The bank was approached by letter on July 28th, 1923. There was no reply until April 28th, 1924 when "...we



A Timely Refurbishment

In order to commemorate the end of World War One, Ruthin Town Council will be refurbishing the Cenotaph, as a way of marking the end of hostilities that claimed the lives of many of Ruthin's young men, writes **ANNE ROBERTS**.

It is intended to have the memorial cleaned and re-lettered, the floor tiles will be inspected and made good, and the railings surrounding the stone will be repainted. It is also hoped to light the memorial by the installation of LED lighting.

I believe this will be a fitting way for Ruthin to mark the event and to ensure that the memorial will last for future generations, so that the great sacrifice made by those whose names appear will be remembered with gratitude and respect.

I personally am delighted by this initiative, as my great uncle's name, Henry Jones, appears on the memorial, one of many of Ruthin's young men who failed to return after the war. He was a resident of Mwrog Street, which statistics show suffered the heaviest number of losses of any road in Ruthin.

The project will also be a part of the Ruthin Future 2 programme to ensure a sustainable future for the facilities and amenities that the town offers to its community.

much regret we do not see our way clear to accede to your request to place the Memorial in front of our premises known as Ye Olde Court House."

Councillor Ellis Williams now proposed that, as public meetings had been unsuccessful, the Council should now assume responsibility. In May 1924, it was decided to proceed with the erection of a memorial on the site between the County offices and the Presbyterian Church On Wynnstay Road on the land donated by the County Council for the purpose. It was also put forward that the plans previously drawn by Mr Harold Hughes, the Bangor Diocesan architect, be agreed upon.

The monument took the form of a column in Aberdeen Grey Granite which was supplied by Messers Garden & Co. from the Granite Works in Aberdeen—the Granite City. The Denbighshire Free Press of October 1925 stated that this granite portion of the war memorial had arrived at the yard of the contractor, who was now the Mayor, Alderman R J Jones, a monumental mason. The pedestal of the monument which contained the names of the fallen soldiers from Ruthin was already in place. It also stated that it was hoped that the complete memorial would be ready for the unveiling ceremony on Armistice Day.

Unfortunately, this was not to be. It was eventually unveiled and dedicated on December 5th, 1925, seven years after the end of the war, in a ceremony performed by Lord Kenyon, the County's Lord Lieutenant.

Seen in Passing...

... Continued from page 7

In May, the former Apparel and latterly Greyhound Rescue charity shop, previously empty, has transformed itself into Ty Architecture, an architect and design office. Although this now removes a shop from town, it maintains a pleasing, handsome shop-like frontage which adds to rather than detracts from our streetscape. Ty Architecture joins a similar transformation nearby at the former clothes shop then Hoethe Kitchens, from August 2017 becoming Compass Financial.



The hot food takeaway on Borthyn appears to have been vandalised—or neglected. As a result, exterior tiling below the widow and doorway have become loose.

There are minor vandalism or damage problems associated with the closed-since-June 2017 Nat West. Part of the rear entrance step has come detached. One of the bollards supporting the chain around the manager's parking space has been lifted or knocked and lies forlorn and unloved on—rather than in—the ground.

10 years almost to the day after Slater's announced it was transferring its Ruthin business to Citroën Abergele, came news on March 5th that its Abergele site was also to shut, ending over 100 years of involvement in that town.

In April, Ruthin entered the 24-hour economy. No, neither the Co-op nor Tesco opens round-the-clock. Instead,

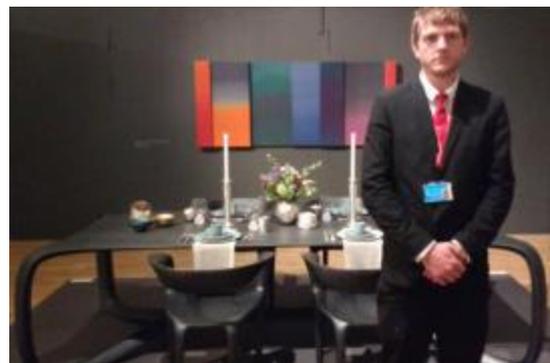


Bridge Services which, since January 2018 has rebranded as BP, is the first shop to trade non-stop, for convenience items & petrol, 24/7/365.

Volunteer litter pickers (see page 15) cannot be everywhere. It's up to businesses and landowners to play their part. May we suggest that Ysgol Brynhyfryd's grounds from the flight of steps off Mold Road into the site is given the de-litter treatment? True,

few people see this area, other than those walking to the leisure centre or school itself. Apart from that—and the lodge as mentioned on page 8—the school site's looking well.

With congregants dwindling, Llanellidan church's PCC has taken the first steps in a difficult decision to close its building. It's miraculous that, in spite of everything, virtually all our parish churches have survived, the only full closures being at Derwen & Rhewl. In Llanellidan's case, however, it looks likely that the PCC will negotiate "pilgrim church" status with the diocese. This means the building will remain unlocked so that all can continue to view its fine wood carving and medieval glass within the typical-of-the-Vale double nave design. It also means that Llanellidan will not completely lose its church: there would be up to six services there a year, plus baptisms, weddings and funerals. It relieves the PCC of much of its financial burdens and it seems a reasonable though sad compromise for all concerned. Llanellidan once had a shop, school and two chapels.



It closed in early April but the "Made for the Table" exhibition between February 8th and April 8th at the Craft Centre featured something as yet unseen in any display there... a security guard! Do not think this reflects too badly on Ruthinians. After all, we have no security firm locally (the Goldsmiths' Company who were displaying hired from Bangor). It's just that some of the antique and contemporary silverware on display was not boxed in or encased. Together with the guard were infra-red cameras.

Short-listed for the Quayle Award and subsequently commended in 2009, the well-restored Picture House has had a chequered recent history but the main unit is currently empty long-term. The alley to its side has regrettably become something of an unsightly tip or dumping ground. Fortunately, this isn't particularly noticeable—but it is getting out of hand.

Having completed Glasdir's school buildings, Wynne Construction has moved on to Clocaenog. To think, just over 10 years ago, there was a real question mark over Ysgol Clocaenog. Now merged with Cyffylliog, the new combined building, Ysgol Carreg Emlyn, remains in Clocaenog.

The History of North East Wales in 100 Objects



17th century shoe found in Porth y Dwr



Ellis bottle



Llyn Brenig urn

prehistoric horse jaw from Gop Cave, arrow heads from Denbigh Castle, a River Dee coracle, the smoking hat of poet John 'Ceiriog' Hughes, a copper manilla from Greenfield Valley to the modern day Airbus wing rib. Students from the Creative Industries department at Glyndwr University have been involved in creating audio pieces related to some of the objects.

By HEATHER WILLIAMS

The Civic Association has played its part in a new free exhibition which opened at Wrexham Museum on April 21st and will be on show at the town's museum till the end of June 2018. It tells the story of North East Wales in 100 objects.

Last year, the Civic Association held an open evening, inviting members and the public to bring items that they felt might be included in the wider exhibition. Two of these were chosen to represent the town and area (see above, left & centre).

This exhibition is the culmination of a two year Heritage Lottery Fund project by the North East Wales Heritage

Forum which was set up to celebrate, conserve and promote the rich heritage of the North East Wales borderlands. The Forum brought together community heritage groups—including the Civic Association—across the region and asked them to suggest objects that each represent an aspect of our local history in a very unique exhibition.

The final 100 represent thousands of years of history from the first evidence of human life up to the technology of the 21st century.

The exhibition divides into six sections: early inhabitants; castles and conflict; industrial innovation; travel and transport; religion and culture; and everyday life. The display is an eclectic mix of objects ranging from a

Dr Shaun Evans, Chairman of the North East Wales Heritage Forum said, "The hundred objects... illustrate themes which wind their way through the area's history. The result is an outstandingly diverse representation of our region's past, stretching over centuries and including items from every part of our corner of North East Wales". A Heritage Lottery Fund spokesman added, "This exciting new exhibition will give people opportunities to learn about, enjoy and become immersed in their unique heritage of which they can be immensely proud."

The exhibition is accompanied by a book "The History of North East Wales in 100 Objects" which is available from Spread Eagles Book, Siop Elfair, Ruthin and the Library.

Spread the Word!

DEREK JONES reports that, since 2010, some 478 public libraries in Wales, Scotland & England have been closed down "to save money"

I grew up in a public library—and not just any public library, but in the first one to take advantage of the provisions of the Museums Act, 1845, which allowed any town with a population of over 10,000 to raise money for a rate-supported library to issue books free for those who wanted to read them.

It was not as if Warrington was the most fashionable place on earth. It still isn't! On the other hand, in the middle of the 19th century, it had an established reputation as a place which valued ideas and words for their own sake—the Warrington Dissenting Academy was the home of the great scientist Joseph

Priestley, well before his reputation was cemented at its more famous counterpart—in Birmingham.

When I say I 'grew up' there, I mean that I spent a good many of my teenage years there with 'my nose in a book'. I would say that Warrington Public Library—it is still there in Museum Street—had just as much influence on what I became than the schools and universities I attended, not to mention the 'university of life'.

'Universities' is a good word, and one that was borrowed by Andrew Carnegie, the great American philanthropist, who had a special interest in public libraries, for which he coined the phrase "The People's University".

He also wrote, "A library outranks any other thing a community can do to benefit its people. It is a never-failing spring in the desert". In our own district, Carnegie endowed, to my knowledge, libraries in Coedpoeth and Central Wrexham.

What would Carnegie—and Priestley—be saying if they could have foreseen that, in the early 21st century, nearly 500 public libraries had been closed in this country, that there had been a £66 million fall in spending on these admirable institutions and, worse, that there were 14 million fewer books on their shelves, than in the last decade of the 20th century?

One battle has recently been won in Ruthin—plans to move the library building have been, to coin a phrase, 'shelved'.



Good! On the other hand, I will risk the anger of some local people if I assert that it would have been better to endure a move than to face the prospect of closure.

I hasten to add that, so far as I know, Denbighshire have no such plans. If they ever did even contemplate such a move, I hope the Civic Association would remember that books as well as buildings are part of our heritage—and take action to prevent it.

I have forgotten the source of the following quote, but it is worth repetition: 'Libraries change lives; they convert people to knowledge and enable life-long learning as well as combating ignorance, alienation, and isolation'.

Taking a leaf from another area of public service, perhaps we should have books on prescription!

HAROLD JONES hopes to see the doors open and the lights on again at this well known pub

In the December 2017 issue of Town & Around, there was an update on Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd's vacant pub which was being sold by the owners, Robinson's Brewery.

A few days after publication, a "Sold" sign appeared on the estate agent's board at the front of the site. This has naturally produced a great deal of interest and speculation among villagers and many in the surrounding areas.

We now know that the new owner is Siân Jones and that she is committed to reopening the building.

A survey of local residents was carried out in June 2017 and as a result an outline business plan and report were produced by the rural enterprise agency, Cadwyn Clwyd. Many residents indicated that The Griffin was important to village life and lots of ideas for events and activities were put forward that could take place in the revamped pub. The report indicated that the vision would be to create a focal point for village life that will act as a catalyst to reignite a sense of community in Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd.

At the start of the project, three options were identified:

1. An unknown purchaser would buy the inn and the results of the survey would be shared with the new owner.
2. The pub would be bought by the community council under a community purchase scheme. Financial support would be needed.
3. A buyer would come forward and lease the pub to a community management company, who would run it on a day to day basis.



The report favoured the last option and this is indeed about to happen: that the new owner intends to lease it to the local community.

Tim Baker, writing in the March-May 2018 edition of "The Link" (the Llanbedr group of churches' magazine delivered to villagers), as a member of The Griffin Group, explains that a committee has been formed to move ideas forward and has the support of the community council. It has come up with the following mission statement: "Our vision is to open the doors of The Griffin in Llanbedr as a Community Hub. We want to create a quality facility for the whole of the community of Llanbedr, a meeting place and function space which will serve the community and bring people together. We want to see the community playing a full part in the running of the Hub and taking every opportunity to support community facilities and social opportunities. We want to tackle some of the key rural problems, such as isolation of young and old alike; employability opportunities for young people where there are none and networking opportunities for home based entrepreneurs. We see the Community Hub as vital to the future survival of Llanbedr as a thriving community where

people can feel they 'belong' and support and interact with each other."

This vision is strongly supported by the community council and Cadwyn Clwyd. Expertise is being sought from specialists in this kind of operation. Architects and designers are advising on internal changes to the pub. A formal constitution will be drawn up and called "Our Griffin" which will allow grants to be applied for.

In mid-March 2018, a note was published on Facebook under the heading "Our Griffin—Llanbedr DC—Griffin Ni":

"Only people who are passionate about making a difference to a local community... innovative, to try something new... and driven to make enough money for a good living... need apply!"

Involving the community at every step is vital. Then, on April 15th, the Griffin Group held a "pop up" event so that all could see and comment on the ideas and suggestions for the pub. There was beer, cakes and soft drinks available. That particular Sunday afternoon proved to be very popular.

Ffynnon Sara

ISABEL STEWART visits an oft-forgotten well

Ffynnon Sara is a very old well situated on the outskirts above Derwen, on the minor road from Claddnewydd leading to Melin y Wig. It is beside an old Pilgrim Route which linked St. Winefride's shrine to St. David's and would have been a most welcome site for the weary traveller.

It was probably once a holy well connected to the Vale's mother church eight miles away, at Llanynys, and from the sixth to the 17th century was known as Ffynnon Pyllau Perl. (Pearl Ponds).

The well is bath shaped, lined with stone, with three steps leading down into the water, all set within a pleasant grassy area shaded by trees.

The water bubbles out of the ground into the well and the overflow joins the Nant Mynian stream.

A 17th century map indicates a long-vanished cottage near the well. The well's name was changed around this time and it is said that a lady living in the cottage was perhaps the custodian of the well and maybe it was named after her. The more likely explanation is that it may have been dedicated to St Saeran of Llanynys.

Ffynnon Sara was believed to have healing powers, curing cancers, eczema and rheumatics. Pilgrims left pins behind in the well as a token of thanks (Google gives an interesting account of such pins).

In the early 1970s, the rector sensitively restored the well and landscaped the area. No mention is made of any pins discovered or any other artefacts of interest.



For pilgrims, the hedgerows would have been a great source of delights and relief. Berries and plants would be picked as they walked along: blueberries, blackberries & raspberries, St. John's Wort flowers containing red hypericum oil to sooth sores and muscle pains, nettles and dandelions infused in hot water acting as a tonic, wild fennel helping digestion, vitamin C from rose hips and plenty more.

“Dad, what was Ruthin like 30 years ago?”

Fran Smyth has written to say that we omitted two long-standing businesses from our brief synopsis of changes—or not—since 1988, the year of the formation of RADCA. This appeared in the March 2018 edition (P6).

They are the businesses at nos. 24 and 24A Clwyd Street. One is Hideaway, which began in 1986 at the premises of Ruthin Memorials at no. 24A and moved to the shop frontage at no. 24, where leather goods are still made by hand. Ruthin Memorials is still at no. 24A and run by the son of D R Vallance, who was the original owner.

We apologise to the two businesses concerned for the oversight.

“Would the last bank to leave please turn out the lights”

A reader has written regarding our March 2018 cover story about Barclay's.

“After years with the same bank, when it closed, I moved to another. Then, that bank also decided to close. Having a branch to go to is important for me, from a business perspective, especially for a cash-rich business: older people prefer to use cash and there are still plenty of customers who offer cash.

“While I understand that a small population and the internet means keeping a bank open is expensive, it's no different than any other business suffering from increases in overheads.

“The arrival of a mobile van is the banking equivalent to the Wild West. It's in a car park in the pouring rain with elder people waiting to be served. There are no seats. Whatever happened to loyalty? Their long-standing customers are no better thought of.

“Banking online is still filled with horror stories. I don't want to do it but feel I'm being forced into it. Otherwise, we're in danger of being left behind.

“It's interesting to note that when Ruthin's Santander closed, Nat West was making a pitch for their customers. How ironic.”

Handyman and Lock Smith

Also in the cover story, we said “There's not a cobbler or locksmith in sight”.

Derek Jones wrote to remind us of the Handyman, Mauro Ladeira, who moved from Clwyd Street to Lôn Parcwr and more recently to Llanbedr DC and who specialises as a locksmith. He's on 07853 384980.

In 1992, in my first address as the newly elected mayor of Ruthin, I said that I was looking forward to being able to finalising the twinning arrangement between the Ruthin area and a similar district in Brittany, writes EMRYS WYNNE.

The previous mayor, Robin Llwyd ab Owain, plus the town clerk at the time, Vernon Hughes and the late Murray Bragg had already made contact with a number of possible suitable towns and districts in Brittany. After a private visit by the mayor, the clerk and Murray, the recommendation was passed by Ruthin town council to proceed with establishing by the summer of 1993 a twinning arrangement between Ruthin district and Commune de Brie de l'Odet, with the aim of having both twinning charters signed during my mayoral year, which had to be extended by one week for this happen.

The Ruthin and District Twinning Association was set up, including representatives from Efenechtyd, Llanfair and Llanynys community councils. The equivalent committee in Brittany was called Comite de Jumelage de Brie de l'Odet, which represented Brie and the neighbouring communes, Edern, Landrevarzec, Landudal and Langolen.

The Brie Charter, which is displayed in the Hotel de Ville, Brie and the Ruthin Charter, on display in the Town Hall, are in four languages—Welsh, Breton, English & French—and bear the signatures of the mayor and chairmen of the associated communities. Gifts were exchanged and the locally-made porcelain gift that was presented to the Ruthin and District Twinning Association is on display in Ruthin Library's Foyer—it is, in my opinion, quite stunning. There will be a Twinning Exhibition in the same foyer this year, during June.

Why have a Twinning Arrangement with the Brie, Ruthin and their districts?

The reasons are numerous. For a start, both communities are bilingual. The Welsh and Breton languages are closely related as, indeed, is Cornish. The names of the communities in Brie bear strong similarities to names of villages in Wales—Lan has the same meaning as Llan in Welsh, which means church. The second element of the name is usually the name of the saint that's associated with the church. Therefore, Landudal means 'the church of St. Tudal', the saint being the Welsh saint, Tudwal (cf. Ynys Tudwal, off the Llyn Peninsula); Langolen looks very familiar to us, as it shares exactly the same meaning as Llangollen—the

church of Saint Collen! We have a village of Edern in Gwynedd and Y Friog (Brie) is in the old Meirionydd.

There are very strong economic similarities. Both areas have agriculture as a major industry. Both Brie and Ruthin have industrial areas and there are a number of food industries in Brie that are supported by the local farming communities.

Brie, in my opinion, benefits greatly from being very close to three Routes Nationales, one on its doorstep and two others within less than an hour's journey in the north and south of Brittany.

However, within 15 minutes to one hour of Brie, there are major tourists hotspots—the large city of Quimper, Benodet, Port de Plaisance, Duarnenez and Locronan to name but a few. Ruthin can boast the town itself and the Clwydian range as local tourist attractions, and the whole of North and Mid Wales being just a good hour's drive away.



Cultural, Sporting and Interest Links

Many groups and societies from Ruthin have made visits to our twinned district in Brie. Ruthin Choir have made two visits, representatives from farming groups, Ruthin Majorettes and Ruthin Football Club have taken part in official visits. Dancers (Gwen ha Du Landrevarzec) and the band (Bagad Brie) have taken part in the Ruthin Festival. Indeed, the Ruthin Festival was initially called 'The Twinning Festival', as the first two festivals were held to mark the anniversary of the signing of the Twinning Charter. This year, on the 25th Anniversary of the Twinning Association, Bagad Brie will return to Gwyl Rhuthun on Saturday June 30th. Readers are invited to visit the Twinning Association's web on www.rhuthun-brie.moonfruit.com and should anybody like to become involved with the Twinning Association please do not hesitate to contact me on Ruthin 704772.

Outdoor Classroom at Glasdir School



Pupils turn wildlife watchers at Ruthin environmental haven, reports BOBBY FEELEY

Wildlife watchers from Rhos Street primary school in Ruthin are ploughing their efforts into protecting and enhancing a countryside haven—a stone's throw away from their brand new school.

Denbighshire Countryside Service manages a piece of land near the Glasdir estate for wildlife interest and in particular for two priority species: the otter and the water vole, two of the UK's fastest declining mammals.

The site is designated for protected wildlife species and, as such, access is restricted. The Countryside Service recognised, however, an opportunity to use this wonderful resource as an outdoor classroom. A new access has been created linking the school to the site, involving the building of a foot bridge which was completed by local volunteers and Countryside staff.

Rhos Street pupils became the first group to visit Glasdir for a tour of the site and to plant some trees and wildflower plugs. The youngsters will also be responsible for monitoring wildlife at the location with 'Go Pro' cameras and other technology, and a hide has been built to help with this. Rhos Street Eco School Group will also help to lead n visits from other schools from Denbighshire and to keep an eye on the Carneddau ponies which are being used to graze unwanted vegetation to encourage wildflowers to flourish. The school will also carry out practical tasks such as thinning of the willow. The by-product will be recycled to weave various artefacts, which will be on

sale at Rhos Streets Summer Fair.

Protecting the environment is a key priority for the Council and pupils from Rhos Street are already on board to help the Council with their environmental efforts at the Glasdir site. They will help to keep an eye on the site and report what they see. There is a possibility there may be otters on the site: how excited the children would be to actually catch one on camera!

Rhos Street school teacher and the school's Eco School Co-ordinator, Joanne Davies, said: "Over a number of years, strong links have been established with Denbighshire's Countryside Service, via the Eco Schools Initiative and this will be the start of a more structured partnership where the children will have the opportunity to be part of biodiversity and sustainability initiatives in a wonderful, natural environment. The group will also help to manage the orchard which has been planted on site and to juice & bottle the numerous apple varieties which will contribute to our healthy eating initiatives."



Ruthin—a litter-free town?

by HEATHER WILLIAMS

One Saturday in March, I participated in the town clean-up around Ruthin—an annual event organised by Ruthin Town Council, supported by a Keep Wales Tidy Project Officer, Rotary Club members and any other volunteers.

On that day, over a period of two hours, we collected 30 bags of rubbish. One of the worst places was by the litter bin near Railway Terrace along the route of the old railway line (parallel to Station Road). I could not believe it when I passed by later that day and saw a takeaway box and a half drunk can left on the seat next to the bin!

I was a bit surprised, therefore, to come across an article on the County Council website that says Denbighshire has some of the cleanest streets in Wales. In a study by Keep Wales Tidy, Denbighshire streets reached a "B" grade or above. Only Powys achieved this high score as well. So, is the amount of litter in Ruthin relatively good?

Certainly the County Council has attempted to address the littering problem. Do you know that Denbighshire County Council currently has a contract with a company called Kingdom, which uses uniformed officers with body camcorders to deal with littering, as well as dog fouling issues?

The trouble is that these officers tend to concentrate on locations with a high number of people (and issues) e.g. shopping centres, and wait for them to drop cigarette ends, rather than larger objects such as plastic



and glass bottles, drink cans and other packaging. Mainly, officers seem to issue fixed penalty notices and progress court prosecutions for dropping cigarette ends, rather than those larger items. Surely the legislation was introduced to deal with litter which is more visually intrusive and damaging. There was a recent programme on TV (S4C Y Byd ar Bedwar) about this company that you may have seen. Anglesey County and now Gwynedd Councils have decided to end their agreement with Kingdom. Some Denbighshire county councillors are expressing their concern about Kingdom.

The fact is, though, if we want cleaner streets, we need to have the enforcement that goes with it. We need to encourage people to use the litter bins or to take their rubbish home but it seems we cannot rely on that—witness the fresh litter at Station Road immediately after our clean-up. The root cause is laziness or carelessness and not Kingdom. Maybe the possible introduction (or re-introduction for many of us who remember it!) of refunds on bottles will help to start to improve the situation.

Ruthin & District Civic Association

2017 Quayle Award

Please join us to celebrate our worthy winner of the 2017 Quayle Award, the Porth y Dwr conservation project. We will present the award at 2 p.m. on June 26th at Porth y Dwr, Clwyd Street. Carol Smith will give a brief talk about the conservation project.

Open Doors

2018 dates are September 8th/9th (Ruthin) and 15th/16th (the district). We will send details to members with September's Town & Around, due towards the end of August. Otherwise, brochures will be in the Library.

April 21st till June 30th—the History of North East Wales in 100 Objects exhibition at Wrexham Museum, Regent Street, Wrexham. North East Wales Heritage Forum has brought together a diverse range of objects that are displayed under various themes to reflect the heritage of the area. The exhibition includes objects on loan from members of RADCA.

Glasdir Primary Schools

As at the time of writing, we are STILL hopeful that members will be able to have a conducted tour of the new buildings now, of course, in use. We will let you know.

Memories and “Story Telling”

The North East Wales Heritage Forum offers training and or free recording equipment for anyone in RADCA (or other affiliates) who may wish to interview local people about any aspect of social history. This may, for example, be useful for the Ruthin Local History Society's Rhos Street School project. If anyone is interested, please use the contact details at the very foot of this page.

General Data Protection Regulations

We are obliged to inform you regarding how we collect, use and keep your personal data.

We hold members' data electronically, as follows: your name, address, telephone number and email address. We collect these from your membership application forms and when you communicate with us. We need to keep these data in order to communicate with you and to administer the Civic Association. We use these data to (i) maintain a list of members and their subscriptions (and any donations); (ii) send out Town and Around, and, electronically, by post or by telephone, inform members of Civic Association news, items of concern or interest, pass on information from like-minded organisations, inform members of events, renewals and other Civic Association communications; and (iii) claim gift-aid on subscriptions and where appropriate donations.

These data are available to and accessed only by officers of the Civic Association. We may hold other information you have given us.

We keep your information up-to-date. If you leave the Civic Association, we will remove your details from our files. We hold your information safely: it is protected by a password.

We do not pass on, share or sell your information to third parties. We do not use your information for marketing. We do not hold any financial details other than the name of your bank and account details where you have authorised us to collect your subscription by way of a standing order.

Town & Around is published quarterly free of charge by the Ruthin & District Civic Association. It is available from Ruthin Library and on townandaround.org.uk. It is delivered free to Association members

We welcome articles, contributions, suggestions and letters, in Welsh or English

Please send them to the Secretary at cymru@clwyd.org or Coedlan, 25 Stryd y Brython, Ruthin, LL15 1JA

The deadline for the next edition which we aim to publish near the end of August is Aug 5th, 2018

Thanks are due to this quarter's contributors:

Emrys Wynne, Heather Williams, Isabel Stewart, Gwynne Morris, Harold Jones, Derek Jones, Gavin Harris, Bobby Feeley, Glyn Evans, Peter Daniels, K R Daniels and with the help of Jane Gerrard

Views expressed by contributors are their own and neither necessarily reflect those of the Association nor those of their employer

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Join Ruthin & District Civic Association and help support our work and the production & distribution of Town & Around

Annual subscription rates are £10 (individual) or £15 (joint/family).

The Association tries to help protect & enhance the outstanding market town of Ruthin and the areas nearby. Our main aims are to promote “civic pride” in the town and surrounding villages. We also aim to promote high standards in planning and encourage architectural excellence. We organise the annual Open Doors heritage weekends and the Quayle Awards.

(1) Name _____

(2) Name _____

Address _____

Telephone: _____ Email _____

I/We enclose a cheque for £10 or £15 (delete as appropriate) payable to Ruthin & District Civic Association. Please forward to Robert Williams, Hon. Treasurer, Lenton House, Mold Road, Ruthin LL15 1SL (tel 704998 / ruthincivic@btinternet.com)