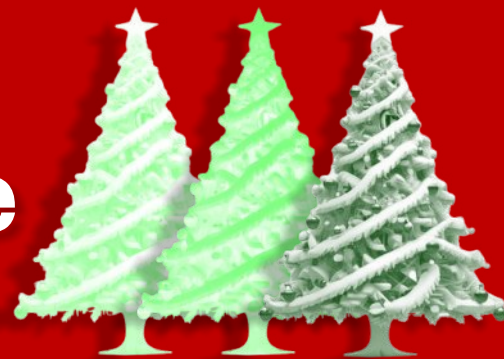


Town & Around O Gwmpas y Dre

Winter 2024/25



News, Comment & Features from the Ruthin & District Civic Association since 2003

Fancy a Bite?

Ruthin may soon have both a Greggs and a Domino's. Should we be concerned at the incursion of such dominant retail giants?

The steady trend of big-name brands marching into our small town will accelerate next year. Pending planning approval for building work, we are set to see both Greggs and Domino's staking their claim in our community.

For all the talk of devastation, the arrival of Tesco (2006), B&M (2008), Wetherspoon's (2012), and Aldi (2020) hasn't entirely swept away the independent spirit of our town. We've clung, admirably, to a tradition of small-scale traders. But let's not romanticise the past: Thresher's, Somerfield, Costa, and stalwart regional names like Mococo, Colgau, and Ethel Austin have all fallen by the wayside.

A look back to 2009 (see p10) reveals how the landscape has shifted. Tesco, then a relative newcomer, stood alongside a sparse collection of big names like HSBC and Boot's. Kwik Save had morphed into B&M, and Lo-Cost had quietly rebranded as Co-op. The independent traders remained the backbone of the town and, though fewer in number now, continue to outlast the boom-and-bust cycles that often plague



Unwrapped for Christmas



The covers are due off the Peers Memorial very soon. Meanwhile, the detail and craftsmanship is illustrated by this beautifully restored griffin now waiting in anticipation of a bite into an unwrapped pizza or steak pie. See pp4 and 5.

larger corporations.

Now we face another change. Domino's Pizza is set to occupy the corner of Well Street and Station Road, replacing W & G Jones's café. A luminous sign in a conservation area? That should raise a few eyebrows, alongside neighbouring signage, good but some poor. Others will frown at the industrial-style window coverings and the inevitable delivery vehicles clogging the junction. Yet, for many, the convenience of pizza on demand and our first real home delivery will outweigh such concerns, even as local competitors brace for impact.

Then there's Greggs, aiming to fill

the old car dealership site on Lôn Parcwr. This roadside location is designed to lure passing motorists. It will still draw footfall from the town centre. It will prove popular, no doubt, despite dietary alarm bells. Chris van Tulleken's 'Ultra-Processed People' (2023) reveals their (frozen) sausage rolls alone boast 40 ingredients, many it seems better suited to a chemistry set. Will this deter anyone? Unlikely.

At least Domino's can claim to care about punctuation. Trademark Greggs? Here were see another 21st century trend: apostrophe optional.

■ What does it mean for Ruthin? p6

From the Chair

Here we go again. I make no apology for mentioning an issue that has been driving me up the wall for years (pun intended). We're still stuck in the same endless loop of delay.



I'm referring to the Cunning Green, of course. What's happened to this once-loved path? It remains closed, for what now feels like a geological age.

This wasn't just any old footpath. It was a charming stroll with views of town not otherwise seen. It even led neatly down to our beautiful park, Cae Ddol, soon to be 'levelled up'. But now? It's off-limits, taunting us like a Christmas box of chocolates you're not allowed to open.

The last collapse was monumental. Walls crumbling and rubble everywhere. And Denbighshire County Council did a decent job fixing the wall behind Lord's Garden. But what about the wall opposite? Still a ruin. Judging by the glacial pace of progress, we'll be watching robot gardeners tend the park before it reopens.

The worst part is the radio silence on the subject. I've been on about this path for so long I'm starting to think I should carve my complaints directly into the stone itself—assuming it doesn't fall over



again.

Anne Roberts
Chair of the Civic Association

■ Our County Councillors are equally concerned about the lack of progress as regards the opening of the Cunning Green. They do wish it to be known that progress is difficult with a number of owners and insurers involved. Issues of confidentiality prevent our councillors making public statements concerning the Cunning Green.

Open Doors 2024

Another successful but different year, writes Fiona Gale

Once again, the first weekend in September was Ruthin's Open Doors weekend. 2024 saw some different activities that attracted a new audience. These linked to two ongoing projects in the town, the conservation of the Joseph Peers Memorial and the Welsh Women's Peace Petition of 1923/4.

Conservation work was planned for the Peers Memorial as part of the Ruthin Levelling Up project. To this was linked a community project, funded by the Clocaenog Windfarm and the National Heritage Lottery Fund. Over the weekend there was an exhibition in The Old Courthouse about the architect of the memorial, John Douglas, a talk by John Douglas expert Chantal Bradburn, a tour of some of his other buildings in Ruthin that included Ruthin School, and the opportunity to visit inside the John Douglas House 'Dedwyddfa'. These were all well attended with over 280 people seeing the exhibition, 15 (the maximum) on the tour of John Douglas buildings, around 30 people at the talk and 24 (again the maximum) visiting Dedwyddfa.

Local Textile artist Bethan Hughes had already undertaken one project in Ruthin, the Thread of Peace, linked to the Welsh Women's Peace Petition, signed in 1923/4 by more than half the female population in Wales in an effort to persuade the Women of America to

support the USA's entry into the League of Nations. In a separate project supported by the Ruthin and District Civic Association, Bethan and members of the community produced textile works commemorating some of the Ruthin signatories. These works were displayed in the windows of the houses where the women had lived back in the 1920s. On the Friday evening Bethan gave a talk about the Peace Petition and her artistic response to it, in the English Presbyterian Church. This was an appropriate location as it was the church used by the Ruthin petition organiser Edith Evans and now has a memorial window to her, marking her role as an elder of the church. Around 50 people came to this talk and on the Saturday, Bethan was rather like the Pied Piper as she gathered more and more people to her walk around the commemorative windows in the town.

As in past years a good number of buildings were open. Once again Gorphwysfa in Castle Street, so far the oldest dated timber framed building in Ruthin, opened on the Saturday and had over 300 visitors keen to see the structure. The Archives organised activities linked to the 1920s in Ruthin and the Peace Petition and had just under 200 visitors, again on the Saturday only.

Saturday was undoubtedly the busiest day in 2024 as Sunday started with torrential rain. There were still some hardy souls going from building to building under umbrellas—but the weather definitely affected numbers on

the Sunday.

As in previous years, the majority of visitors were from the north east Wales area but there were some holiday makers to the area who took advantage of the events taking place and were pleased to have an extra insight into the area in which they were staying. There were visitors from Manchester, Warrington, Alsager, Harlech, Essex, Caernarfon, Beverley and perhaps the farthest afield from Seattle USA.

■ The Civic Association would like to record its thanks to the organising Sub-committee and in particular to Fiona Gale for co-ordinating this year's venues and events, as she has also done so well over the past few years.



A Walk on the Wild Side

Anne Roberts takes a walk through town and wonders what's going on

Ruthin, the town of my birth, the place that has been my home for many, many years—an enviable spot, a town we should all be deeply proud of. I remain so, of course. But let me be blunt: strolling through the town today, down its main streets, has not been the most uplifting of experiences.

Take Well Street, for example. A sorry sight, with empty premises, the kind of thing that's become all too common in these modern times, though it does not make it any easier to bear. There's the ghastly signage on the Turkish barbers and the Vape shop, all



on or near listed buildings as if no one in authority had the slightest care for aesthetics or historical integrity. A real shame. Just how are we persuade the coming Domino's Pizza not to slap a bright, flashing fascia on their store, adding to the eyesore?

Then, of course, there's St Peter's Square. I defy anyone to look at it and not feel a concern. It's little more than a building site at present. Our beautiful Square looks utterly dreadful and I can't help but feel sympathy for the businesses that are still bravely trading there. Builders' vans occupy every last parking space, showing scant regard for disabled people or, frankly, anyone who needs to park in the vicinity. Don't even get me started on the former Barclays Bank building. Goods piled up against the windows, old furniture cluttering the outside, and an industrial-looking ramp that couldn't be more out of place. This important building deserves far better treatment. A little tidying up, a bit of care.

As you proceed down Clwyd Street, you'll come across the eyesore that is the old barbershop and Candy Shack building. Whitewashed windows, left to languish in their unsightly state for years.

Can't we, as a town, make the landlords take some responsibility and do something about it? It's been long enough.

Further still, Ocean Pearl, which, let's be honest, looks like an ongoing building project that has stalled indefinitely. A hole punched through the gable end, boarded up, and left like that for an age. And let's not forget the atrocious state of the nearby public toilets. Not the best welcome for anyone entering our delightful park with its new play equipment.

I do apologise if all this sounds a bit grim. Ruthin is being badly let down. Where has the pride gone? Where's the effort to maintain our lovely town as a place that people want to visit, a place we can all feel proud of? It's not just the empty buildings, it's the tiredness that's creeping in everywhere. Even the places that are still open seem to be in need of a good lick of paint and some TLC.

I implore Denbighshire to take a hard look at Ruthin—not from the comfort of a council office but from the residents' perspectives. We deserve better and so do the visitors who come to admire our town. A little more pride, a little more investment, and a little more care for what makes Ruthin truly special. Is that too much to ask?

Quirky Walks Around Ruthin

Fiona Gale continues her walk around town in search of its more unusual side

A while ago, while walking around Ruthin with my dog, I noticed a small metal plaque on a house in Castle Street. Cast into the sign was F H 8' 0". I was intrigued but the only thing I could think for F H was 'flood height' and if Castle Street in Ruthin had been flooded we were all in big trouble. I then noticed a couple more of these signs, one on the front block of the Old Gaol in Clwyd Street (where flood height would make more sense) and one in Well Street, pointed out to me by Moira Roberts who knows so much about Ruthin.

With a bit of research I found out that the F H doesn't have anything to do with floods but it does link to water. It stands for 'fire hydrant', and the distance marked (in feet and inches) is that to the nearest hydrant.

What has proved more difficult is dating these cast iron signs. Modern day signs are a large capital H on a yellow background and, if a distance is given at all, it's metric.

The change to metric measurements came in 1975 so the signs we see are certainly at least 50 years old. However,

I suspect they are much older, maybe dating to the late nineteenth or early twentieth century.

Re-reading the two excellent articles about the Ruthin Fire Service in the Ruthin Broadsheets (a fantastic source of local information which are all now digitised), it was at this time that the Ruthin Fire Service was operating very successfully under the command of the Captain of the Brigade, Theodore Rouw.

Rouw was a well respected figure in Ruthin, living at Exmewe Hall on St Peter's Square and involved in the family's chemist business.

It makes sense for part of the upgrading of the fire service that occurred at the turn of the 19th/20th centuries to include clear indications as to where the sources of water were available.

If anyone knows anything more about these signs or knows of any more in Ruthin, do let the Civic Association know. I challenge you to find the one on the front block of the Old Gaol—I know it is there and struggle



to see it!

■ v.gd/broadsheets for the local history broadsheets

Quayle Award Leaves Town for Second Year

There's a certain tired joke within Anglican circles. If the vicar wishes to remodel their church, the only way to do so without offending the congregation is to move the pews each Sunday by an inch at a time.

Quayle Award winning Grade II-listed St Peter's Church, Llanbedr, fortunately took a more direct approach. They embarked on a substantial building project to modernise their internal space.

The Victorian St Peter's is a 'new' church. In 2024, it celebrated its 160th anniversary. Unlike the Vale's once-open mediæval churches, St Peter's has always had pews. It's been rather

static.

The vision at St Peter's was to remove them. West of the chancel steps, this would create an open and flexible community space that could be used outside worship. This approach actually mirrored most mediæval churches before the Victorians got their hands on them.

To do this, St Peter's had to fundraise. For example, they sold 1,000 cakes. They also applied for a raft of small grants. Then incumbent Revd Huw Bryant recalls one question on a grant application: how much experience did they have in building and heritage restoration work. In a reference to St

Searen's, Llanynys, his answer was that the Church locally has been building and remodelling heritage buildings since the fifth century!

The Quayle Award is not the only accolade for St Peter's. It was the first in Wales to win gold 'Eco Church' status. As for the Civic Association, the conferment of its Quayle Award is the second year in succession for a project outside Ruthin. The previous award went to the St Dyfnog's Well refurbishment, Llanrhaeadr.

It has to be said that there were congregants at St Peter's who were less keen on a pew-less church. The plans included for the first time a

kitchen, lavatories and even a coffee machine, all to sweeten the deal. There was therefore no need to begin the process of moving the pews one inch at a time. That would've taken decades. And, after seeing the results, there's been a universal acceptance within the church and whole community that the project was the right thing to do.



'Insuring' (sic) Travel at 20 mph Pays Dividends



October 2024 at a 29 per cent reduction in my comprehensive motor insurance.

My premium price drop was for identical cover, with the same insurer, with the same mileage, in the same car (albeit one year older). How come?

This is thanks to 20 mph. Amid all the negativity of 20 mph we are at last beginning to see something positive.

This alongside the benefits to our urban areas of civilising and vastly reduced road speeds.

Premiums seem to be reducing in Wales thanks to the reduction in casualties and crashes. Comparing April - June 2024 with the same quarter in 2023 and the number of recorded crashes and casualties on 20 & 30 mph roads was down by 24 per cent. There were similar reductions in the previous quarter.

During the first nine months since September 2023's introduction and we have seen collisions reduce by 26 per cent and a 28 per cent reduction in casualties, again in combined 20 and 30 mph areas.

Some drivers are still ignoring 20 mph, sometimes blatantly. But there are those who now appreciate its worth—not just for road safety but in order to humanise the motor car on our urban areas.

Denbighshire County Council is currently reviewing public feedback on new Welsh Government 20 mph guidelines. There do need to be changes and tweaks, but we trust that councillors will continue with the broad policy of keeping 20 mph areas intact.

We shouldn't be surprised that 20 mph has resulted in an insurance premium reduction. To the three key mitigations in terms of premium we should now add a fourth: appropriate speed.

We need the reduction to help cope with the expected 2024/25 increase in council tax!

Among the many variables in setting your motor insurance, there are only three key ways to keep your premium down: run a lower-to-ensure car. Enjoy a good driving record over as long a period as possible. Keep your mileage low.

In an era of staggering increases in utility bills, imagine my surprise in

Making the Grade

A prominently located grade II listed building has this year been thoroughly refurbished, writes Peter Daniels

The late 19th century-fronted Plas Tirion sits in a prominent position near the junction of Dog Lane and Well Street. As Cavendish Ikin or Williams Estates might have put it, it has recently seen 'an extensive programme of modernisation'. Actually, such a phrase is an understatement: since 2021, a local resident using local builders has gutted it and reinvested heavily to create holiday accommodation.

What makes Plas Tirion different, however, is that in time it will also be available for small groups to hire for meetings and creative events. Hires are expected to be for one room to the whole house and garden, as required.

Plas Tirion is a beamed two-storey property. It has a steeply pitched roof under which is generous living accommodation including in its attic space. It is situated between the NFU Mutual offices and The Old Cinema. Its reason for being listed is as a town-house with early origins (perhaps 18th century), its remodelled c.1900 long front, and retaining good character and detail within from this period. When purchased by the current owner in 2021, it had previously been residential flats.

I am sure in 2023 & 2024 we have all watched with interest as the scaffolding has gone up and the roughcast front repaired and painted from its previous ochre to an attractive neutral pink-grey with conservation pink-red detail (with attractive replanted front garden to match, behind railings). Again, as estate agents might state, the front is 'visually appealing'.

The interior is 'well-appointed'. Local builders were responsible for the



Potential for future group hires: more formal settling around a table or informally in seated area

thoroughly refurbished accommodation. From a holiday perspective, this has three suites, sleeping from two people. The whole house if hired together accommodates eight. Each suite has at least some reclaimed or refurbished features, from the part-use of a former chapel pew and fireplaces to vintage reupholstered chairs. The rear reclaimed flooring not only provides an air of authenticity but is practical so far as access to and from the communal garden is concerned. All suites have an en suite and kitchen. In addition, there is a communal kitchen suitable for group hires. The utility area is designed to accommodate muddy boots. There's also a bike rack fitted. Booking is via holidaycottages.co.uk which feeds to sites such as bookings.com and, inevitably these days, to Airbnb.

The property has been designed to allow groups to meet independent of the holiday accommodation.

This is one side of the accessible ground floor (front and middle rooms). These can come with use of the communal kitchen, if desired. This would be available for

societies, clubs, hosted evenings, fine dining, artists and so on. The completely transformed and welcoming garden can be included for groups or hired separately. There are two relatively private areas for smaller groups to use, with the promise of more to come.

A major selling point of the garden is the closeness of the open land beyond (the fields between Corwen and Wrexham Roads), These are rarely seen from Well Street or town. Much of the time, this is infamously waterlogged and ducks have even been known to come from the fields up to the garden for a nose.

That's another nice touch for such holiday accommodation. 'Where nature meets a charming tranquillity', as our estate agents might say.



Plas Tirion, grade II listed, Well Street



Fancy a Bite?
From p1

What could Greggs and Domino's mean for the soul of our town?

■ The arrival of the likes of Domino's and Greggs tends to suggest a community experiencing some shifts in consumer culture and more affordability-driven dining options. These can indicate some changes to the underlying economy and even demography.

■ Domino's attracts families and younger consumers with discounted meals. Greggs offers budget-friendly meals. These suggest there's a market for affordable, quick service restaurants in areas where high earners are perhaps declining. They cater for the cost-conscious consumer. Van Tulleken suggests that ultra-processed food is associated with areas where average wage rates are declining. Could this be the case in Ruthin?

■ Greggs out-of-town location reinforces the need for a car. The town will thus adapt further to modern car-oriented lifestyles, presumably to the detriment of the town centre.

■ Their presence represents a shift from a traditional reliance on local businesses more to national chains. Both brands tend to reuse vacated space following occupancy by failed businesses.

■ The jobs they provide are low-barrier, entry-level and flexible. They may indicate that there are limited employment options in other economic sectors locally.

■ The coexistence of historic areas (like conservation zones) with expanding chains suggests socio-economic pressures to modernise. Conflicts may arise between maintaining a town's character and fostering economic development.



Time Has Come for Town Clock

Rob Price marks the conclusion of Ruthin's first Levelling Up project: the Peers Memorial

By the time you read this, the long anticipated work to the Peers Memorial should be complete (fingers crossed!).

The Ruthin landmark has long been a symbol of the town and the focal point of the Square but many had not really looked at its condition. Instead, most rather just glanced at the time occasionally, without realising and carrying on their way to the shop or place they needed to reach. (It was surprising how often we did this: it was most noticeable when the clock face wasn't there.)

The project started in 2021 with the forming of a voluntary committee. There followed the securing of plans and costings. A community exhibition at The Old Courthouse has now finally happened.

The project, funded by Ruthin Town Council, the UK Government, the Heritage Fund, Denbighshire County Council and the Clocaenog Windfarm Fund, had the intention of restoring the Peers Memorial to as good a condition as possible.

As background for readers, the structure was built in 1883 as a memorial to Joseph Peers, a local man who in the mid-19th century was Clerk of the Peace in Denbighshire for over 50 years. It was designed by the prominent Chester architect John Douglas and is now registered with Cadw as a Grade II listed structure. The owner of the town clock is Denbighshire County Council.

No work had been recorded to the building since at least 1972 but after such a period and like any other building it needed some attention. In July, 2024, the plans were again on display to the public in The Old Courthouse, with the work commencing in August 2024.

Inevitably, once the scaffolding was up, more issues and problems were found than anticipated. Decades of dirt and plant growth had now been removed from the stonework, stonework repairs carried out and new mortar for the whole structure installed. The clock's mechanism was carefully removed and was repaired and restored by clockmakers and repairers Smith of



Derby and by now should be back in its position.

The project was very fortunate to have the services of R Moore Building Conservation from Bodelwyddan as the principal contractor, whose meticulous high quality work will be evident to all who view the clock now the scaffolding is removed. Work on such an ornate structure is no easy task, so having a company who have undertaken conservation work on historical

buildings all over North Wales and beyond was of huge benefit to the project. The photographs of the clock before and after the project truly show the impact of the work undertaken, while always sticking to the principle to restore the memorial as close as possible to its original condition without altering any of its features.

To confirm, the memorial's water features have not been restored owing to various factors, so the voluntary

committee therefore took the decision to place a wooden bench on the front water trough of the clock. In any case, many people sit on the trough all year round. Except for this one small alteration, every other element of the work is like-for-like i.e. no changes, only repairing areas that have eroded or decayed over time.

Stone replacement has been an absolute last resort (and then only with an identically coloured stone), with a variety of methods deployed before then. The work of Elinor Gray Williams in terms of developing the plans and overseeing the work to the memorial has been invaluable.

Credit is also due to the project team at Denbighshire County Council, who have managed the project through from the securing of funds for the capital work to completion of works to the memorial.

Larger and more contentious projects now await them such as the remodelling of the public realm area at and around St Peter's Square. At least one of the projects that formed part of Ruthin's Levelling Up funding is now all but complete.

While the scaffolding was not particularly pleasing to the eye, it was only for a few months, and the work will ensure the Peers Memorial will remain in good condition for many decades to come. The clock will look slightly different: hopefully cleaner with less visible damage, but hopefully local people will regard the project as time well spent!

A Towering Collection of Work Inspired by the Peers Memorial

Peers Memorial restoration project co-ordinator Heather Williams looks at a soaring success



Thanks to funding from Clocaenog Forest Wind Farm and Ruthin Town Council, work started on developing community engagement activities earlier this year connected with the restoration of the memorial on St Peter's Square, colloquially known as the clock tower. This included a talk by Fiona Gale, an April visit to the Archives and also an exhibition in the Old Courthouse during July.

Following additional summer funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) received by Denbighshire County Council, the restoration committee has put together a programme of arts and crafts activities.

Three artists were appointed who proposed a varied range of activities which are suitable, ranging from sketching, 3-D cardboard models, collage work using self-adhesive vinyl, and print making. There are nine workshops for adults and six for children. Interestingly, the cardboard model and the vinyl

workshops make use of some material which is recycled (cardboard boxes and vinyl off-cuts from vehicle sign-makers).

The workshops started on October 19th and continue throughout the autumn until 7th December with the artists Emma-Jayne Holmes, David Setter and Ruth Thomas. Thanks to the NLHF all the workshops are free to participants. There are a maximum of 12 spaces per workshop except for those with Ruth Thomas which has a maximum of 10.

As these workshops are based in the Ruthin Craft Centre, they are being promoted in the usual way by the Craft Centre, which is via its mailing list and Eventbrite. Information obtained from the workshops held to date indicate that, while some people are local, others are from outside the area, from as far as Crewe in the east, and Harlech in the west.

At the time of writing, Emma-Jayne Holmes has held a sketching workshop with adults and 3-D cardboard models with both adults and children. The younger children (age eight to 11) worked together to make one clock tower model, whereas older children and adults made individual ones or worked in pairs.

Comments on the sketching day for adults included, 'Fantastic workshop. Great teacher. Well-paced and very enjoyable way to spend the day'.

Comments on the adults cardboard model workshop included, 'Wonderful



relaxed atmosphere and great to learn more about our local heritage'. The children's comments included, 'It made me concentrate more and work as a team' and 'Entertaining, creative and brilliant'.

David Setter (also known as Doodle Dave) has held vinyl collage workshops with both adults and children. Comments on the vinyl collage workshop for adults included, 'Lovely to learn something new with a very encouraging knowledgeable tutor'. Children's comments included as 'Vinyl is a very expressive material and I enjoyed using it to make our abstract art' and 'It made me feel relaxed and happy'.

■ v.gd/7xZEXv

Images clockwise from top left: Adult workshop; vinyl art inspired by the memorial; some completed adult models; and the children's clocktower



Thinking Outside the Box

The scourge of pavement parking at the Well Street/Station Road junction could in future be thwarted by the strategic positioning of floral or perennial box planters.

The Town Council is considering how it can improve upon its floral displays. One possibility is the use of planters.

With the likely re-establishment in 2025 of the town's 'Incredible Edible' initiative, some of these planters may

even have a practical purpose in growing and offering basic self-sufficient food ingredients for free. The existing Incredible Edible planters off Park Road and at Crispin Yard are now looking tired and are inaccessible for people with some disabilities.

Gradients in town mean that not everywhere is suitable for planters. Planters may nevertheless feature on The Square following levelling up.

Vehicles thoughtlessly parked at the Station Road/Well Street junction severely impact on pedestrian visibility across a popular footfall desire line



Writing a Fiction Trilogy Set in Wales

by Martin Kaye

'The Fallen and the Fled' brings to a close a writing project that I began earnestly in November 2017. Back then, I was unwell, struggling with depression and anxiety, which would ultimately bring my career as a primary head teacher in South Wales to a premature end.

The writing of 'On Badon Field', the first book, is a tale in itself and I shall forever be indebted to my late dear friend Ken Newman who believed in me and the book. A former newspaper

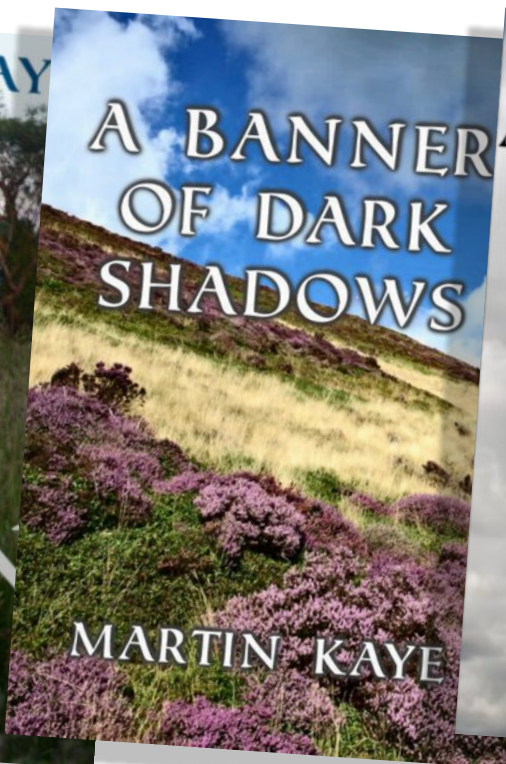
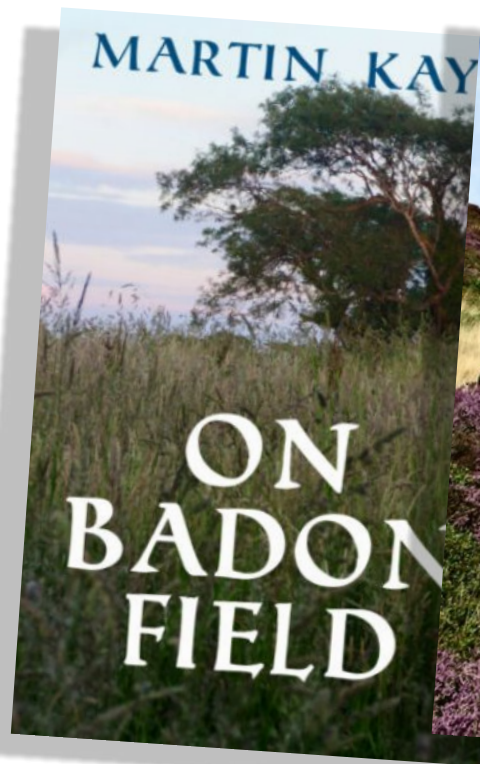
former lives until it is too late. Death and oblivion creep ever closer as they find themselves entangled in the endless struggle between good and evil, light, and dark.

All three books are loosely based on Arthurian legend, and build on the rich local mythology and ancient locations of Wales to weave an authentic feel to an adventure that spans the millennia.

The series opens in the summer of 1985. Whilst looking for treasure in a boggy field on the edge Ruthin, Tim, one of the books' characters, picks up a

public lecture she is confronted by one who brings the banner of dark shadows, and the past comes screaming back. Now Philomena must confront the demons and return a balance to all things.

Growing up in Ruthin the past felt very close. Surely in antiquity this was a place of significant importance. With looming hills on both sides crowned with ancient Iron Age hill forts, today the town of Ruthin sits on a collection of low hills in the Vale of Clwyd. Once, in antiquity, however, these were islands adrift in an



reporter, Ken would ask to see each new chapter as I wrote it week by week. The subsequent discussion between us ensured that a first draft was swiftly in place and gave me the confidence to continue with my writing.

Much of the first book is autobiographical. It follows the lives of a small group of young adults who are beginning to find their way in an adult world. At that age I was a mad keen amateur archaeologist, even conducting my own dig in the garden of my parents' house in Ruthin. My experiences then, of growing up in Ruthin, bring some of the historical and mythological background to the books. I have used real locations throughout and this helps to make a fantastical story feel real.

The three novels are all mainly set in Wales during the end of Roman Britannia and in present times.

On the eve of battle on Badon Field, four friends are tricked into using a magic charm when they promise to look out for each other during the battle and then on into eternity. In so doing they set up a chain of events that brings them reincarnated into modern times. Unfortunately, a sinister presence has also trespassed with them from the distant past, and they do not recall their

stone carved with strange markings. The past is suddenly awoken, and an ancient evil is disturbed. Tim's destiny together with those of his friends is reconnected to the man he once was long ago – Arth, second son of the Votadini and war leader of the Britons.

In the final instalment, 'Fallen and the Fled', Menas, an Eastern bishop experiences a vision in which he is directed to gift the most precious relic of Christianity to the beleaguered Christian communities of Britannia. Too old to endure such a journey, his vision guides him to entrust the relic to Daria, a pagan girl who will make the journey on his behalf. The relic, a small wooden goblet that was used when Christ broke the bread and shared the wine for the Last Supper, will help the believers in far off Britannia to keep their faith. In Britannia, however, a darkness awaits the arrival of the Grail.

Philomena (Daria) has lost touch with her Ruthin friends. Her career in archaeology has taken off with a job offer at Oxford University and the memories, the flashbacks of an ancient life cease. Had she imagined it all? Were these flashbacks just the product of a teenager's overactive imagination? Then, without warning during a busy

area of flooded swampland. A liminal place, perhaps once precious and revered by the druids for in such localities they believed the gods were close.

In the days of my childhood there was no evidence to suggest a Roman presence in the area, but today the archaeology is catching up fast. With the discovery of a Roman temple just outside the town, Roman burials on the Ruthin hospital site and field systems on Brynhyfryd Park; Roman Ruthin begins to re-emerge from the mists of the past. With new finds emerging after the collapse of the Cuning Green wall there is now an increasing body of evidence to suggest that the remains of a Roman military base do indeed lie under what is now the town's medieval castle.

Might the old gods and spirits still linger in such a place?

If we listen carefully, might we hear their whispers on the wind?

Let's trust light overcomes darkness.

The three novels in the trilogy, On Badon Field, A Banner of Dark Shadows and The Fallen and the Fled may be loaned from Ruthin library or purchased through all good bookstores. They can also be downloaded digitally on Amazon Kindle.

Seen in Passing...



Williams Estates has moved from the corner of Well Street and Record Street. Notices in the windows of their former premises told prospective clients to go to their new office on St Peter's Square. Was this a case of 'location arbitrage' ('location advantage')? This is where an estate agent 'moves' a property to a more desirable location to increase its value. Williams Estates is still on Well Street, nearer to but not actually on the most desirable St Peter's Square. In describing it as St Peter's Square, we wonder if they've become too used to their own creative descriptions.



Talking of things moving locations, your sharp-eyed Editor saw the variable message road sign at the Dafarn Dywyrch roundabout at the A542 and A5104 by Rosie's Cider near Llandegla. It's in the Llangollen direction and reads a slightly-exaggerated four miles to the Horseshoe Pass... but eight to Ruthin, in spite of Ruthin being in completely the opposite direction.



50 years ago, there was much less Welsh on our public signage. Since then, the public sector has changed. Imagine our surprise, however, when on October 31st we saw the bilingual Heritage Fund logo on the newly wrapped Peers Memorial hoardings. Alongside the English 'Made possible with...' was this: 'Cam about wi help fae...'. If you say that with a Glaswegian accent, it rather sounds like 'Came about with help from...' Welsh it certainly isn't!

Mind you, Welsh has appeared in some unusual places. Our Treasurer spotted this in a Malesmbury, England publication.



Not seen in passing any more was this notice on the side of County Hall on Wynnstay Road. For the past 28 years, it has survived the closure of Glyndŵr District Council. It was getting lose and we suspect someone has wrenched it off the wall as a souvenir. Wherever it is, it could really do with going to the Archive.



October 2024 saw part of the Wales International Festival of Photography staged in The Old Courthouse. Ruthin was one of two venues in North Wales. As honoured as Ruthin

was to host this, the pictures were underwhelming in almost every particular to a philistine such as me: their diminutive size, their number and their somewhat dull shadowiness. What saved the exhibition was in fact a 200-plus scrolling presentation of superb images by the Ruthin Camera Club.



Overheard in passing in town was something along the lines of, 'As I get older, all I need in life is a branch of Specsavers, one of Boot's and another of Gregg's. Yes, *all I need is specs, and drugs and sausage rolls.*' We already have Boot's the Chemist and we're to get a Gregg's (p1). When can we expect a Specsavers?



No, this isn't trick photography or Photoshop. There's an epidemic in pavement parking in town. This vehicle, however, avoided parking on the pavement by floating over it. It still blocked the footway but no offence was committed. This was during an otherwise welcome redecoration of Wetherspoon's.



Outside, the building looks great. We're not sure what's happening inside, though. We refer to G Parry's Oliver Bell premises on The Square. In the window is this urban planning mock-up. In view of G Parry's interests on The Square, we wonder whether this is his vision for it.

15 years ago Town Centre Special

Say what you like about the invidious Google, the launch 15 years ago of its Streetview product has been one of the wonders of the web. You can poke around any remote corner of the world and it has revolutionised how we use a large number of third party online applications.

Streetview has also left us with an remarkable legacy. Alongside today's streetscape, you can use it to wander back in time. In Google maps, without layers selected, drag the yellow 'pin man' to the map to see Google's streetview, click top left on 'See more dates', then select a year.

Using Google to Compare 2009 with 2024: 15 years

In 2009, we were in recession. That isn't technically the case in 2024 but money's tight and there's huge pressure from online sales. In September 2009, at six per cent of retail sales, online trading had not taken off. In September 2024, this was 26 per cent. The result? Irreversible change to the town centre.

It's therefore not surprising that the number of empty units is currently high. It's actually about double that in 2009. In addition, a dozen units have transferred out of commercial to residential use. These include Michael Taylor & Co, the Wynnstay Arms, Vale Insurance, Artefacts, Gorphwysfa B & B, Anfried's and Ye Olde Cross Keys. This trend will continue.

Between new residential uses and

Christmas Market Biggest in Wales

By the time T & A is delivered, we should have experienced on Saturday November 30th the biggest street market in Wales and, indeed, across the whole of the north of the UK... here in Ruthin.

In its fourth year, the market is expected to attract 6,500 people (subject to the weather). As such, it has become a significant addition to our calendar, alongside Gŵyl Rhuthun Festival and Open Doors, all three now major economic generators.

There was entertainment for all the family, including several choirs.

The Town Council opted for one of its five free parking days to coincide with the market. The Ruthin Fflecsi bus again operated a timetabled service around housing estates.

On the same evening, we see the light switch-on and the festival of lights wagon cavalcade.

empty commercial units, that's knocked out an incredible 39 premises. Note, however, in 15 years three previously categorised as residential

have moved to commercial use (former Blossom's, Well Street; the yoga centre, Market Street; and Just Investment Strategies, Castle Street).

The base of occupied commercial units has therefore shrunk. But there is still a good supply of traders in town, at about 140. Most are independent, family-run concerns and

most are businesses less likely to be troubled by online competition.

These include beauticians and hairdressers. You'd be hard pressed to get a hairdo online. It's often said that we are a town of such premises, and also coffee shops.

Women's hair and beauty has actually reduced between 2009 and 2024 by three but the proportion is higher give the shrinking number of occupied units. The number of men's barbers has doubled since 2009. There is one café and one restaurant fewer in 2024 compared to 15 years previously.

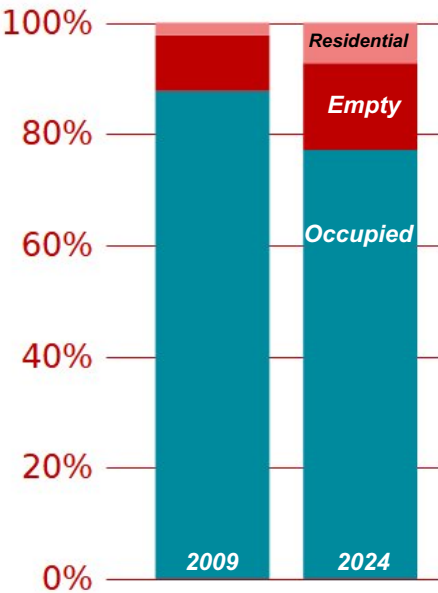
The number of units now occupied by professional services (accountants, solicitors, architects and the like) has increased by one-third. The number of estate agents, however, has halved. Beresford Adams, Clough and Molyneux (formerly at the Dodd's premises) have gone and Williams entered. This reflects two principles: we 'shop' for real estate online; and the



Ruthin housing market no longer commands the interest it once did. The post-pandemic rush aside, people at present seem less inclined to move



here. We have one more supermarket in 2024 than we did in 2009 (Aldi). There were three soft furnisher's in town in 2009. Today, we have none. We were once renowned for our women's clothes shops. That number was 11 in 2009. Online shopping has put paid to that. They have halved to





six, including second hand sales and a seasonal prom dress shop. Losses include Apparel, Amber Bridal, Ethel Austin, Montecito, Simmi, Elysium and Wildcatz (shoes). Nubee's, Well Street (former Beresford Adams) has recently opened.

Other online casualties include banks and building societies which, in 15 years, are down from four to one.

We shouldn't forget that some empty premises are undergoing (glacial) refurbishment. When completed, we might even forget about this unfortunate period. If we do, streetview will be there to remind us.

What's Your Christmas Wish?

Two local businesses have recently posted on social media of tough times on the high street.

Naturally Ethical on St Peter's Square has warned us that its shop is fragile and could close unless we are prepared to support it more. Alongside a range of refillable and organic options, the shop stocks good quality products that are a real addition to a small town's offer.

Her message was particularly poignant and heartfelt.

Naturally Ethical moved to the Square and painstakingly renovated the front in an attractive manner consistent with the conservation area and, in particular, the Square. It is a model for others to emulate.

The owner of nearby Jus4Paws recently issued a cry for help regarding closing businesses, parking charges and empty streets. She said, 'I feel Ruthin is disappearing' adding that businesses are all struggling. 'We say how lovely it is [here, and] that makes us feel fine'.

We've said it before but if we wish to see a vibrant town centre we have to use it. It's always been in our own hands. We have a choice. Let's use that choice wisely, especially during Christmastide.

Why not make their wish your Christmas priority this year?

A Second Chance From the Earth?

What exactly is happening to the former Crown House Café, Well Street?

Empty for some years, the good people at Resource took over the Crown House café in February 2023. They promised ethically sourced on-the-brink-of-expiry food at reasonable prices. They called it 'Seconds'. They subsequently renamed it 'From the Earth'. The mission was to reduce food waste.

13 months later, in March this year, came the announcement that the café would close 'until further notice'. Since then, it's been barely used, adding to an air of forlornness on Well Street. This, after all, is another heritage building that is under-used.

The café is still largely closed. It does, however, host events of 'Outside Lives', a third sector organisation involved in improving people's well-being.

More importantly, it offered free hot meals on November 1st for those in food poverty. There may be plans to

do something similar in December and, if so, you will need to book a free ticket via the Resource website.

They are open occasionally offering free leftover fresh food and other food groceries. The focus now appears less about reducing waste and more about ensuring those in who struggle have ample to eat (or, at least, access to more food). We're told that they can offer a home delivery service.

None of the above counters the fact that the premises are no longer in use regularly but at least there is still a positive narrative emerging from Crown House. That story could in future continue: at the time of writing, it's positive to report that Resource is advertising for staff for From the Earth.



Rose Cottage Up For Grabs



Prior to renovation

standard. The house had previously been inhabited till 1996, when the former owner died.

Before restoration, Rose Cottage was hidden behind a rendered front and its thatched roof was covered by rusting corrugated iron sheeting. There was a rear corrugated iron rear lean-to. Internally, plaster was hiding its timber framing.

Before Rose Cottage, the current owner had previously renovated Crown Cottage, Well Street.

The asking price for Rose Cottage as at October 18th is £225,000.

There's currently a rare opportunity to buy one of our most prominent—one of Wales' most prominent—heritage dwellings.

Rose Cottage, Rhos Street, is a grade II*-listed late mediæval cruck-framed hall-house. It boasts one of the Civic Association's green plaques.

Cadw calls it 'an exceptional survival of a mediæval cruck-framed hall-house of relatively low status'.

Its current owner completed the restoration of Rose Cottage some 25 years ago, having bought the house in 1998. The work was undertaken to an exacting



Rose Cottage today

Town & Around Needs You

Over the previous couple of years, Town and Around has on occasion stretched to 16 pages. Usually, we aim for a more manageable 12.

With this issue, however, we almost had to resort to eight pages only.

To keep to the usual dozen pages depends upon articles or suggestions received.

Without these, we can never guarantee to fill 12 sides of paper. Each quarter, your Editor bites his nails to do so and, to date, has always managed it... just...

If you have ever considered writing something for T & A, now would be the perfect opportunity to do so. The deadline for the Spring 2025 edition is February 15th. If you are at a lose end over Christmas, why not get typing?

Or, if you prefer, just get in touch with an idea and we can try to do the rest. See opposite for contact details.

Please keep this valued organ alive and relevant, by making a contribution on heritage, environmental, cultural or historic subjects. Or anything else.

The remit is very broad.

Our Archive Also Needs You

The North East Wales Archives (NEWA) is currently looking for volunteers to join its Ruthin volunteer group.



Through volunteering at NEWA, volunteers can learn new skills and gain local knowledge, as well as join a small sociable group.

The volunteer group meets twice a month on Tuesday mornings for up to three hours between 9.30am and 12.30pm at the County Archives at the Old Gaol, Clwyd Street, Ruthin.

The current project involves working through uncatalogued council files which cover many aspects of the council's responsibility during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

■ If you are interested in volunteering, email archives@newa.wales. Also for more information via the Archives website: v.gd/DuqA4k



Cymdeithas Ddinesig Rhuthun a'r Cylch
Ruthin and District Civic Association

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Editor: Peter Daniels
Layout & Design: Peter Daniels

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 is February 15th, 2025

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

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Ruthin & District Civic Association

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). If you are not sure if you are a paid up member, please check with the Treasurer.

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)