

Coronavirus Chronicles

▶ In March, the pause button was pressed on normality. In little over a fortnight, we saw supermarket queues & stockpiling, a run on lavatory paper and on sanitising hand gel—even before some of us knew we actually needed it. We witnessed schools close, then cafés & pubs. Many people are now working from home and older & vulnerable people are self-isolating. Sporting fixtures were all cancelled.



Then, all non-essential shops closed. Council offices shut. And, even now, there are unwelcome gaps on supermarket shelves. We were initially restricted in terms of one daily exercise and we could not associate outside the family in groups of more than two, always provided we keep a socially safe distance. Packages of financial support were progressively

available to companies, firms, employees and self-employed people. Here, then, we chronicle lockdown in Ruthin...

Wednesday March 4th

As film crews finish up, nothing suggests normality than Netflix shooting in and around the Old Gaol. They say that this may put Ruthin on the map. Ruthin Castle begins to display posters for Mothering Sunday—which later will be aborted. Meanwhile, for the past few days, just one thing dominates the news. By the middle of the week, we find ourselves out of sanitising hand gel.

The sun brings out quite a number of early visitors and this morning is particularly encouraging. But attitudes change by the end of the week...

Saturday March 7th

The delight that is 'Gwahoddiad' rings out at 9a.m. over Ruthin from St Peter's. Only there are few in town to hear it. It's Saturday and it's even quieter than usual. By the bank on the Square are the usual two optimistic Jehovah's Witnesses and there's a 20-something with ear-pods who callously coughs into the open air. That's it.

And, Clwyd Street is quite literally devoid of pedestrians—empty doesn't come close. Try desolate.

Calls for self-enforced isolation and working from home become inexorable. This is social history in the making—but for all the wrong reasons.

Even before coronavirus, the Myddelton is irregular. The artist next to Harris Toys on

Villages Respond

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Who Was Betsi?

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Zooming Around

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Take a Seat

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Old St Peter's Church, Llanbedr

p15 Who was Fred Walmsley?

Self-isolating: a miscellany | In Passing | Eyes in the back of your head | Open Doors 2020 2021

Clwyd Street is gone. J's Barber Shop is a victim of a saturation of barbers. The Conservative Club has its back against the wall. Costa Coffee now closes daily at 5.p.m. Jan's Cards remains empty.

Tesco, Co-op and B & M have high stock levels but there are signs of strain. You can still get liquid soaps in Tesco but supplies in the Co-op or B & M are like

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Mothering Sunday was cancelled



Circumstances dictate that this edition of Town & Around has a different feel to it—see p3

Coronavirus Chronicles

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hand gel and are all snatched away. Long-life milk's evaporated. In a sense, it's a bit like the rush of Christmas... but without the promise of turkey or any of the joy. Or, perhaps it's more like the days after Boxing Day, when those people around in Ruthin are out not because they want to be but because they have to be. In such an environment, even Gwahoddiad struggles to lift our morale.

Wednesday March 11th

Italy announces lockdown. It's the first country in Europe to do so. As Wales holds its breath, it surely couldn't happen here. Could it?

Friday March 13th



Toilet Roll Armageddon as stockpiling intensifies. Is it the news from Ruthin Town FC of a suspected covid-19 case that sparks today's Tesco rush? Is this enough to engender if not alarm a mass wave of customers? Or is it the prime minister's statement yesterday?



No one seems panicked, rushed or ill-mannered but there is also a steely resolve about shopping in what is a very busy store. There's an underlying tension.

Certainly today seems to escalate the importance and significance of the outbreak. Overnight, it is suddenly more real, more undeniable, more immediate. Ironic, really, that this is Friday 13th (for those who set store by such superstitions).

Ruthin FC cancels its game owing to the ill player. Then, Football Association of Wales suspends all matches. Later, we hear that there is virtually no sport anywhere tomorrow. And so our world begins to shrink.

Sunday March 15th

Town is quiet today—till you reached B & M, the Co-op and Tesco. B & M's car park is full (but that doesn't take much) and there is a buzz of customer movement outside and within. Tesco's car park is not quite at its peak but business is brisk.



The usual high profile commodities people thus far are hoarding continue in short supply, as the number of empty boxes on shelves increases.

Tesco sees few baskets and mainly customer trolleys stacked high. Tins, pasta, rice, medicines, caster sugar, flour, the usual and less usual are all in short supply. Shelves remain devoid of lavatory paper. There seems to be a heightened number of older people out, perhaps as a result of media speculation that those over 70 would shortly need to reduce dramatically their contact with others. One wears what looks akin to a pair of medical gloves. Everyone is congenial & affable yet at the same time purposeful and, unlike in some places in the media, there is no hint of carnage, chaos or anarchy. Anxiety levels rise.

By 3p.m., everything is quieter to something like a normal Sunday. A number of far eastern students from Ruthin School take advantage of the last hour of Tesco's availability, wearing face masks, the first seen locally.

There were plenty of people who claim never to have deployed panic buying tactics. Given the state of some supermarket supplies, I wonder who these are.

Monday March 16th

Unofficial lockdown in all but name begins. The County Council clears its calendar of meetings for the ensuing week. Some County Hall departments leave to work from home.

Meanwhile, both our governments advise us that we should avoid pubs, cafés and restaurants.

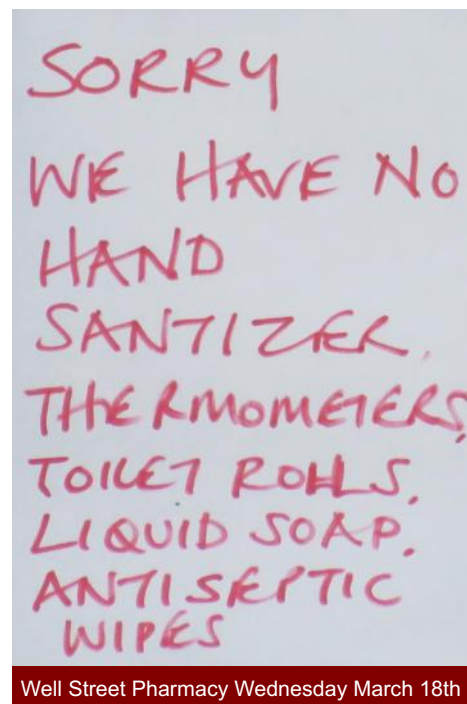
Tuesday March 17th

More staff leave County Hall to work from home. Ysgol Brynhyfryd becomes the first school in Wales to close. It cites 23 vulnerable staff and a further five who have vulnerable family members.

The supermarket situation is slowly deteriorating. Perhaps retailers are

concentrating on larger settlements and bigger stores. Now, there's no paper products in the Co-op or Tesco at all, with kitchen roll and paper handkerchiefs joining lavatory paper. Bananas and other fresh foods are in short supply—if people are indeed stock-piling, let's hope they eat everything before fresh food rots.

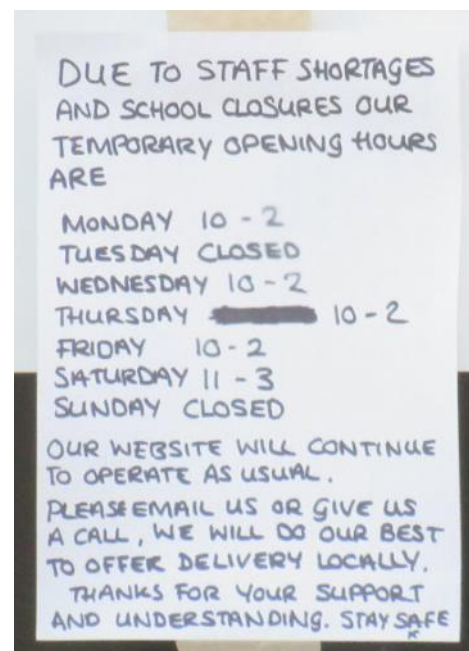
There are just three lonely people on the Square.



Wednesday March 18th

Brynhyfryd may be closed but the town is absolutely devoid of children. County Hall car park is busier than expected but still more than half empty. More and more County Hall staff begin to work from home. This will impact the town greatly. But, it's necessary.

Many adhere to government advice: at



A Message to Members and Readers of Town & Around

With so little going on since our previous publication and not being able to distribute this in the normal way, this June 2020 edition of Town & Around is a little different.

For one thing, it's only available digitally; there's no printed hard copy. This is to protect the volunteers who usually

distribute it. For another, the customary rich content is set aside, thanks to there being less than usual upon which to report. There have been fewer than usual contributions, too. There are more images within than normal and the number of pages is fewer.

Instead, much of this edition concentrates

in words & pictures on setting down for the record the first three months of coronavirus in Ruthin. We trust Civic Association members and readers will understand.



lunchtime, Chatwin's has eight café patrons, Costa five and Bar Llaeth three. The Coffee Cabin is closed. The two sat at a table in W & G Jones's café are slightly forlorn-looking staff. Early evening and I spot one head at Wetherspoon's window facing the Square, a handful in the Boar's, three in the Star and a similar number in the Feathers. How long before these close for the duration?

Thursday March 19th



"These shops are [our] livelihood... we are risking our health so you can shop"

More and more signs appear on business doorways and in windows. They inform patrons of revised hours, expected changes in customer behaviour or complete closures, thanks to coronavirus or the school situation, as proprietors and staff struggle with a new reality.

The oddest is at the entrance to the HSBC. It tells us that, from the weekend, all HSBC branches will close at weekends. The Ruthin branch does not open then. HSBC is using the epidemic to encourage laggards to bank online. "Stay safe. Bank at home". Where is this likely to leave the branch & building when we emerge out of the current crisis?

W & G Jones café has two patrons at lunchtime; Chatwin's three; Gail's six; and there is no one in Bar Llaeth. The Coffee



Cabin is again closed. And, from today, Costa effectively becomes a takeaway, with shrunken opening hours, plastic crockery, takeaway cups and no seating available. There is one person within.

Friday March 20th

The Craft Centre closes to the public from today.

Tonight, the town is shutting down. Distancing has just got more distant. As some seem hitherto to disregard the advice, we now have no more restaurants, pubs, clubs, gyms, cafés and leisure centres. They're all to close. Our Prime Minister makes it very clear that people should not be going out tonight and pubs should close as soon as possible. Yes, tonight.

Every pub is open this evening as those inside enjoying their last orders. Patrons are nevertheless few, certainly at 8p.m. There is about half a dozen in the Star; about a dozen in the Boar's; a similar number in the Vaults; and I'd put it at about two dozen in the Feathers.

Tomorrow, Saturday, will be a very different Ruthin. A number of local restaurants announce permissible takeaway services, such as On the Hill, Ocean Pearl, The Myddelton Grill, the White Horse Hendrerwydd and the Nant y Felin.

Sunday March 22nd

The first of Ruthin's rainbows begin to appear in windows.



A chalked Mothering Sunday greeting appears in Bryn Eryl alongside various chalked rainbows elsewhere. Long may the rain stay away, so that these can brighten our lives for days to come.

And, for the first time ever, there are no services in any of our town or village chapels or churches. Last Sunday, they are defiant—though the number of those

coughing is suddenly apparent and noticeable. Today, they are shut.

Monday March 23rd



This morning, this man opens Costa so he can close it up completely. It is as if Costa knows what is afoot.

Today in Ruthin, although there are previous changes among the hospitality sector, shops remain open. How many feel or even know that this is for the last time? Trefor Jones puts it well in its window notice that appears yesterday: 'Open as usual (until told otherwise)'.



Well, this evening, they are told.

Not that there are many customers about today. At lunchtime, I see four people on Clwyd Street, two on the Square and absolutely no one on Well Street. Car parks are largely empty, with 39 cars parked in total. A further 28 are parked on-street. There are 16 drivers parking at the Co-op and there are fewer than 40 staff in County Hall. In fact, two scallywags are taking advantage of a mostly deserted County Hall car park to kick a ball around. We expect County Hall to close to the public tomorrow—this is due even before the Prime Minister's announcement.

This evening, we hear from our governments that full lockdown is



it's been very quiet all day. Yesterday's groups of children, sometimes with groups of adults, are all vanished.

County Hall is now officially closed to the public. It's still available for such staff as required.

And, Ysgol Brynhyfryd closes (again) this afternoon. It has previously opened on Monday to receive its share of children of key workers or those deemed as vulnerable. I'm not sure anyone actually turned up.



Loggerheads, Moel Famau and the leisure centre all close today, with locked gates across car park entrances. The country park's closure is no doubt hastened by reports over the weekend of crowds in rural honeypots.



There are now a significant number of local businesses laying staff off or placing staff on furlough, as our American cousins might say. Construction can continue but Taylor Wimpey announces with immediate effect it is closing its Glasdir site and sales centre. This is the second interruption there, the first following the November 2012 floods. Builders' merchants Richard Williams and Huws Gray also close today.

Wednesday 25th March

What strikes me this morning is the change in commuter traffic volumes. Today, there are far fewer cars on the road. Workers no longer need to bring stuff back home, perhaps, after yesterday.

What a cruel twist, today, though. Throughout the day, blue skies, sunshine, no breeze, temperatures nearing 20°C—and time on our hands. Yet, here we are, confined to barracks. Three cyclists pedal by. The occasional single walker enjoying their single shot at

exercise. A mother and young children. A few cars all pass by.

And, this afternoon, at once, the air is filled with the fetor of the season's first barbecues come early.

The broadcast news is compelling but also disturbing and disheartening.

Thursdays March 26th

Virtually no shops open and a solitary person this lunchtime on Well Street, three people on Clwyd Street and one person on the Square retrieving money from the HSBC cash machine to use, well, we aren't sure where. Such businesses as still able to trade far prefer contactless payments, to minimise risks. And those open were Chatwin's (not its café); Well Street Pharmacy; Ruthin Wholefoods; Boot's the Chemist; the Post Office; and the HSBC. Plus B & M, Co-op and Tesco.



Chatwin's is open for bread, confectionery and a takeaway service and now accepts contactless payments only.

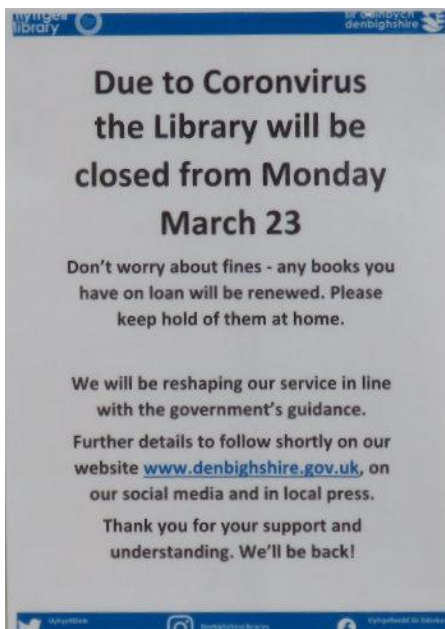
At lunchtime, there is a solitary car parked in Well Street plus one between Boot's the Chemist and the Old Courthouse. Eight were parked on Clwyd Street. Four cars and a motorcycle on Wynnstay Road. The main car parks collect 18 cars between them.

County Hall car park holds 15 cars which indicates that there were likely just 15 people inside the building. The rest of the staff work from home.

Tesco introduces a queuing and entry/exit system to its Ruthin store, with a combination of on-their-side trolleys, barriers from Taylor Wimpey and cones & tape from Hunter & Lewis. You grab a trolley from a shelter, queue outside, enter by the left and staff limit the numbers in the store at any one time. You then leave on the right, go to your vehicle and return your trolley for disinfecting. The Co-op has started something similar, in a smaller way, by disinfecting basket handles on entry.

HSBC changes its opening hours to 10a.m. to 2p.m. The bank isn't able to open today, owing to coronavirus-related

official—with immediate effect. We can shop for essentials as long as it's infrequently; exercise once a day on our own or as a family group; travel only for work where there's no alternative; and otherwise stay at and work from home. That is the stark message and it is no doubt not helped by the shameful scenes over the weekend of people queuing at beauty spots.



The message means that all shops other than pharmacies and groceries are now shut; the library, too.

Tonight's with-immediate-effect lockdown ratchets up this emergency. In a sense, however, we are still in a phony war. As yet, we remain very worried but we try to carry on as normal. So far, we are all fit and healthy.

With pubs now closed, the latest grocery shortages are alcoholic beverages. Wiped clean are the Tesco alcohol aisles. I guess even those who don't frequent pubs are stocking up in case those who do take the lot.

Tuesday March 24th

Lockdown Day One. Our Chief Constable reports at lunchtime that traffic is down in North Wales yet the morning commute is as busy as ever.

What I can say is that outside my house



staff shortages. Just after lunchtime, Ruthin's sub-postmaster announces new hours from next week.

Friday March 27th

This week's weather is exceptional for late March but none of us has been able to take full advantage of it.

One phrase sums this up: unprecedented. We live in truly unprecedented times. Or, "unpresidential", as one shop notice in Ruthin put it. Another closed business asked us to phone if we have an urgent inquiry (we assume they meant "enquiry"). No names, of course.

And yet, in spite of all this, it's still the calm before the storm in Ruthin... how fast the storm is approaching we do not yet know.



Tesco replaces the row of on-their-sides trolleys with more barriers.

Saturday March 28th

Here's a new phenomenon. A couple of closed shops are clearing out their windows, in some cases for a paint-up. You cannot blame them, even though, we trust, the likelihood of a smash 'n grab is limited. Each of the empties nevertheless leaves a temporary chasm in town.



And a small number continue with blinds down.

Not only is Mococo heeding government

instructions in closing its shop, it is longer fulfilling orders on line: it's website is also closed for a period.

Meanwhile, mayor Cllr Gavin Harris begins his weekly video broadcasts.

To assist queuing and physical distancing, Chatwin's introduces hazard tape.

Sunday March 29th

The Eagle's Bakery joins the long, long list of closed businesses in town. They cite government guidance as the reason for the closure but suggest they'll be back on April 14th—and they do. In the meantime, bread is still available at Lôn Parcwr's Bakehouse, W & G Jones, Duke's Stores, as well as supermarkets.



The empty Montecito window is transformed into a joyous, boisterous pandemonium of colour. We very much hope that the sentiment as expressed in the lower panes will prove to be prescient and foresighted.

Monday March 30th

During these astonishing, bewildering and bizarre times, Ruthin town centre is now usually almost always devoid of people. You barely need one hand on which to count those on the streets.

So, what's going on here at Monday lunchtime? It's for the post office. As of



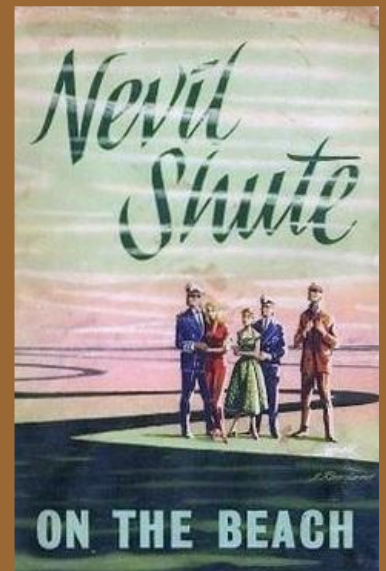
Book Review

Fancy a good read while in lockdown?

"On the Beach" is a compelling read. Based in 1963, the 1957 book examines the end of the world, thanks to an overwhelming and unstoppable release of radioactivity following World War III.

It follows several residents in the world's last inhabited major city, Melbourne, as the toxic fallout moves mercilessly south. First there are months to wait; then weeks; then days... no one can survive.

Nevil Shute observes how different characters react. Some are stoic; some in denial; some are angry; some use the time to drink their cellars dry; others look to fulfil their lifetime's ambition.



Till near the end, there remains a semblance, a veneer, a cloak of business as usual. There's only a hint of self-pity. All before everyone falls seriously and fatally ill. Goodnight Vienna (Vienna, New South Wales, that is).

No swearwords, no blasphemy, no sex here, just a measured writing of small pleasures in difficult circumstances while expressing just enough pain and suffering.

And, just like in March 2020, alongside the banal, the mundane, the sports reports, Shute's 1963 radio dispassionately broadcasts updates, as the winds spread radioactivity progressively southward, as town after town goes "out".

Could there be huge parallels with today?

In March, as I write this review, people still wander around town. It's almost as if there's nothing to do but to carry on regardless, Shute-style, in spite of the weight around everyone's necks.

today, it opens on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays only, between 10a.m. and 1p.m. This shot is at 12.32p.m. and there remains a fair number of customers still to serve. Most people obey the call to stand 6' 6" apart. The post office has done well to maintain a service, often solely relying on the sub-postmaster himself.

Bus services to Mold; to Denbigh via Llandrnmog; to Clawddnewydd & Cyffylliog; and to Graigfechan are all slimmed down from today.

Wednesday April 1st

Intermittent light rain this morning, enough to generate that sweet deluge smell more associated with the end of a long dry summer. It's much more pleasant than yesterday's, following a fire at the waste transfer station. Yet, the first rain of lockdown does not last long.

It's bin day in half of Ruthin: black, green and orange. Except green waste is now suspended, to ensure there are sufficient crews to move general and food waste. This does not stop the more optimistic putting out their green bins today, though. Or perhaps some households felt that the suspension was little more than an April fool's joke.

Today, the new 20-plate vehicle registration is a month in and by now there are barely half-a-dozen in Ruthin. Are these to be future collectors' items?

Saturday April 4th

We have a revised system in Tesco. At the end of your shop, you now need to queue along aisle 11 before being taken to an appropriate check out. Shoppers are nevertheless scarce today. We are making fewer visits but buying more each time. Or perhaps we are all stocked up so much that we no longer need to get out at all. I see little evidence of increased home deliveries. They would be noticeable, as estate road traffic is now at a minimum.

Ruthin's Chatwin's is closing today (for now).

Today, we learn that the Feathers public house is opening its guest accommodation free of charge to any NHS worker forced to self-isolate.

The Town Council begins to think how businesses might emerge from and contemplate life after coronavirus.

Sunday April 5th

From today, Arriva Buses suspends its X51 service from Ruthin to Wrexham. The service continues between Ruthin and Denbigh.

Monday April 6th

The Co-op has today introduced a one way system. Well, almost. The number of aisles means that it doesn't quite work but

it's a good step, regardless. Whereas shopping at Tesco can now be stressful, that at the Co-op is more relaxed. It's also eerie in the Co-op during the day. Fewer patrons and a few with facemasks contribute to a sinister tension.



It's the school holidays but the Glasdir schools, above, remain open throughout as the primary school hub for key Ruthin & district workers' children.

Wednesday April 8th

The number of rainbows in and around town steadily grows. Some now in addition show three letters, namely H, S and N.



This week, HSBC tries to formalise the way its customers observe physical distances. New notices appear alongside old on the stonework at the entrance. And, ingeniously, the branch has chalked markers on the pavement to assist its customers to maintain the required 6' 6".

Saturday April 11th

A change in the weather. Unlooked-for persistent rain washes away many of the chalkings on pavements, including the distance markers at the HSBC.

Sunday April 12th

Easter and no family or friends allowed. No holidays or short breaks. No open countryside. No beach visits. No meals out. No drinks down the pub. No taking children to play areas. In fact, none of the things we might traditionally do on or associate with a dry Easter Day.

And, no chapel or church services, either. Our Warden, the Revd Stuart Evans, and others in his congregation, have maintained a daily Facebook video

Going Green?

Green areas left to run wild offered a rare treat for us to absorb freckled banks of daisies, with dandelions scattered like idle gossip; and the rarely seen verge-side wild flowers, such as the forget me not, fragile speedwell, vetch, campion, scarlet pimpernel and even the invasive Spanish bluebell were this year all spared the first scything of spring.

Is there a public debate to be had as to whether all our green spaces need to be so manicured? In future, could we set aside land for wild flowers to flourish?



presence viewed to date 5,551 times, plus 1,702 for children's stories. St Peter's Llanbedr saw 995 views on Maundy Thursday.

To gladden us in difficult times and to the accompaniment of "Happy" by Pharrell Williams & His Band, the mayor races round Ruthin with a substantial rainbow on his back, alongside a human-sized Easter bunny. Rain however stops play.

Thursday 16th April



The First Minister gives Ruthin's Workplace Worksafe an honourable mention during the Welsh Government's daily coronavirus briefing. Workplace Worksafe is responding to the call to source a more local supply chain following the international scramble for personal protective equipment.

Friday April 17th



Applauded, King's ironmonger reopens, with table at the entrance upon which the Kings place items they have retrieved for you from within. It's back to queuing with service from behind the counter, 1950s-



style. Condensed hours apply and the shop's closed on Wednesdays.

Saturday April 18th

A large sign (below, left) urging us to stay home appears and is just about visible off Mold Road.

The home owners remove the slogan part on May 9th, at the time when the UK government changes its message from "Stay at Home" to "Stay Alert". In Wales, though, the "Stay at home. Protect the NHS" message continues unchanged.

Monday April 20th

Schools return from the Easter holidays—at least remotely online. The Glasdir schools continue as the hub school.

Friday April 24th

Travel for exercise is barred and cycling other than what might be considered as within walking distance is also prohibited. The Welsh government is changing the core requirement for people not to leave the place where they live—to a requirement not to leave or remain away from that place.

Sunday April 26th

Arriva temporarily suspended its Ruthin-Denbigh service, though a replacement by Lloyd's Coaches begins tomorrow.

Monday April 27th

Richard Williams reopens for pre-booked account customers only. The "closed" sign remains for several weeks, though.

Both pedestrians & traffic ramp up.

Monday May 4th



Before...

Verge and green space grass cutting resumes.



... and after

Huws Gray reopens today, with specific timed slots for click, collect & deliveries...



... as Taylor Wimpey also reopens its Glasdir site. It creates passing places for walkers along the barriered perimeter.



Friday May 8th



County Hall flies a flag in commemoration of the 75th anniversary of VE Day, today. Otherwise and given the circumstances, there is little evidence in the town centre of this commemoration.



A number of us nevertheless throw caution to the wind and attend appropriately distanced street parties or similar celebrations. A further sign that people are becoming more confident?

After the events, clinicians warn that this is not necessary a wise move... whether connected or not, there is a spike in covid-19 cases in North Wales, 10 days later.

Saturday May 10th

Fine and hot before the weather deteriorates a little. Even more people are about in town in complete contrast to April.

Other than queueing for King's, the pharmacies, the two butchers or Ruthin Wholefoods, there's little actually to do other than bide. People promenade in the sun. Much more traffic, too.

Are people becoming still more confident? There's a sense with protracted lockdown that some of us are now getting restless, resentful, even edgy; while others look back on the now fading quietude, opportunity and serenity of lockdown with just a trace of yearning for the simpler life we are soon about to forfeit, possibly for ever.

Monday May 11th



The three devolved nations disagree with today's English approach. "Stay at home. Stay local" remains the mantra in Wales. There is no lifting of the lockdown, at least for a further three weeks, though from today exercising is permitted in Wales more than once a day. In truth, latterly, some (many?) ignored the previous once a day exercise rule, anyway.

A busy day in Ruthin. Morgan's reopens for the collection of phone orders.



Morgan's

Chatwin's in town reopens today, but with condensed hours between 9a.m and 2p.m. and not at all on Sundays. Chatwin's soon extends its times to 3p.m.

Meanwhile, new rules from today enable



garden centres to reopen and our own Seven Oaks does. Family groups are welcomed though no one under 12, please. Interestingly, the florist on the Square also reopens.



Seven Oaks Garden Centre coronavirus notice board

The post office now opens five days a week (still on compressed hours).

Sunday May 17th



Heather Williams

The scarecrow competition sees fewer than usual entrants. Quality trumps quantity, though, and most are on a VE Day or NHS theme. As befits the times, Colonel Sir Tom Moore is predicted the winner.

Monday May 18th

The Town Council reconvenes 'virtually', using Zoom.

Tuesday May 19th

Fortnightly green waste collections recommence in Ruthin. Some have green waste collections today, Tuesday; others wait till Wednesday May 27th, such is the luck of the draw. There are no collections since March 18th, which now seems a



whole season ago, thanks to the presence of coronavirus.

Wednesday May 20th



Heather Williams

Temporary classrooms are removed from Ruthin School. Planning permission is soon to expire and coronavirus is expected to have a detrimental impact on the number of students attending from the Far East (not to mention the home grown problems faced by the school in January 2020).

Thursday May 21st

A number of takeaways start back, joining the likes of Aydin's which has stayed open for the duration.

Saturday May 23rd

Supermarket supply issues have eased, though fresh greengrocery can be problematic. Flour is back on the menu.

Tuesday May 26th

The warble of the ice cream van brings the sound of summer to this specific area of Ruthin for the first time. Till now, we've only heard it the distance.

Thursday May 28th

The civic amenity site at Lôn Parcwr reopens for those who have booked a slot. Well managed and, unlike elsewhere in Britain, there is no evidence of huge queues.



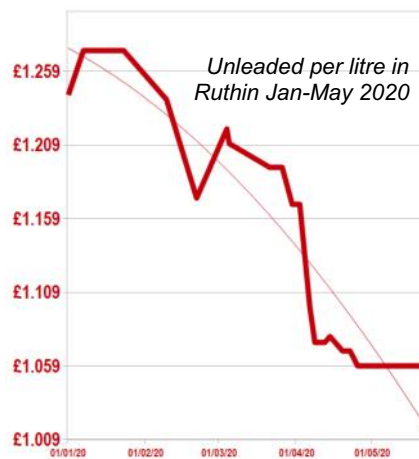
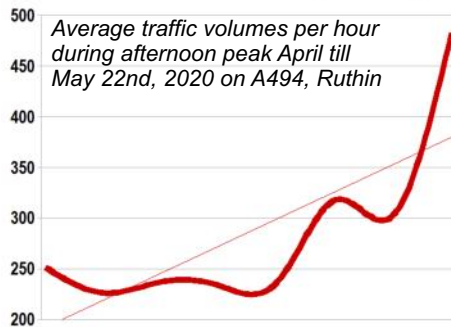
Friday May 29th

We wait with anticipation an announcement from the Welsh Government which may ease lockdown. Will we have yet more confidence?

Temporary Changes in Travel Behaviour

Unsurprisingly, the volume of traffic on local roads has dropped. To start with, though, there was the expected modest seasonal climb associated with late February & early March 2020. Volumes then fell back on and after March 9th. This proved to be short-lived: between March 12th and March 16th, stockpiling resulted in a steep climb. On and following March 17th, however, volumes reduced considerably.

After reaching a low point at the end of March 2020, volumes during April were broadly static. They increased markedly in May 2020. Take estimates of the average afternoon peak traffic per hour locally on the A494. Here, comparing the end of April to the first week in May 2020, volumes had increased by a third, with a slight dip during



the following week in May. The change in traffic locally on the A494 during the third week of May compared to the corresponding week in April 2020 was an increase of just over 100 per cent.

In spite of this significant rise, the span of the afternoon peak period in May 2020 had reduced. In other words, it had become more concentrated. During "normal" times, it is common to see peak traffic extend till after 6.30p.m. to accommodate residents returning from England south. To late May 2020, however, traffic volumes after 5.30p.m. were considerably down and an hour later very infrequent.

In May 2020, very localised traffic within

Ruthin itself over this truncated afternoon peak period increased by an estimated 200 per cent, compared to April 2020.

Meanwhile, the cost per litre of unleaded petrol has slumped. Initially, at least, this was something to do with OPEC and Russia at a time of unprecedented falls in demand.

Unleaded started the year at £1.26 per litre and at press date had dropped to £1.06, the lowest since March 2016.

Finally, Google produced anonymised mobility data at county rather than local level. The graph below shows the changes in trips for groceries during March, April and up to May 16th, 2020 compared to a 2019 baseline.



Who was Betsi Cadwaladr?

Derek Jones makes enquiries

I confess that, having lived round here for 20 years, I have only recently thought to ask that question—despite countless visits to hospitals and surgeries administered by the University Health Board which carries her name. It has taken the covid-19 pandemic to make me repair the omission, though I guess I was not alone in my previous lack of curiosity.

One of a large family, she was born at Pen Rhiw farm at Llanysil, near Bala in 1789 (a fateful year during which the French Revolution erupted). From a young age she always had itchy feet. She departed for Liverpool when she was 14, became a maid for a merchant ship's captain, with whom she tracked across Europe, including to the scene of the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, but also, further afield to Australia. During her extensive travels, she learned how to deliver babies and to give general care to sick members of the ship's crew.

Returning to London in 1854, just as the Crimean War was beginning, she may have read the following appeal by William H Russell, the war correspondent for The Times, 'Are there no devoted women amongst us, able and willing to go forth and minister to the sick and suffering soldiers in the hospitals of Scutari? Are there none of the daughters of England (sic) at this extreme hour of need, ready for such a work of mercy?

In response, Florence Nightingale was



drafted as 'Superintendent of the Female Nurses of the East'. Betsi Cadwaladr, now aged 65, trained as a nurse at Guy's Hospital near London Bridge and joined others in the Crimea, but was assigned by 'the lady with the lamp' to sewing duties! There was already a clash of personalities. Florence, upper class, a friend of cabinet ministers, believed in the necessity of discipline; Betsi, working class, frustrated at being kept from proper nursing, was never one to keep silent.

Betsi Cadwaladr was finally sent to Balaclava, nearer the front line, and was quickly confronted by the consequences of what was later called 'one of the worst managed wars in history, with deaths due to illness and malnutrition four times the rate due to enemy action'. Conditions were appalling. Betsi reported 'the first [soldier] that I touched was a case of frostbite. The toes of both the man's feet fell off with the bandages. The hand of

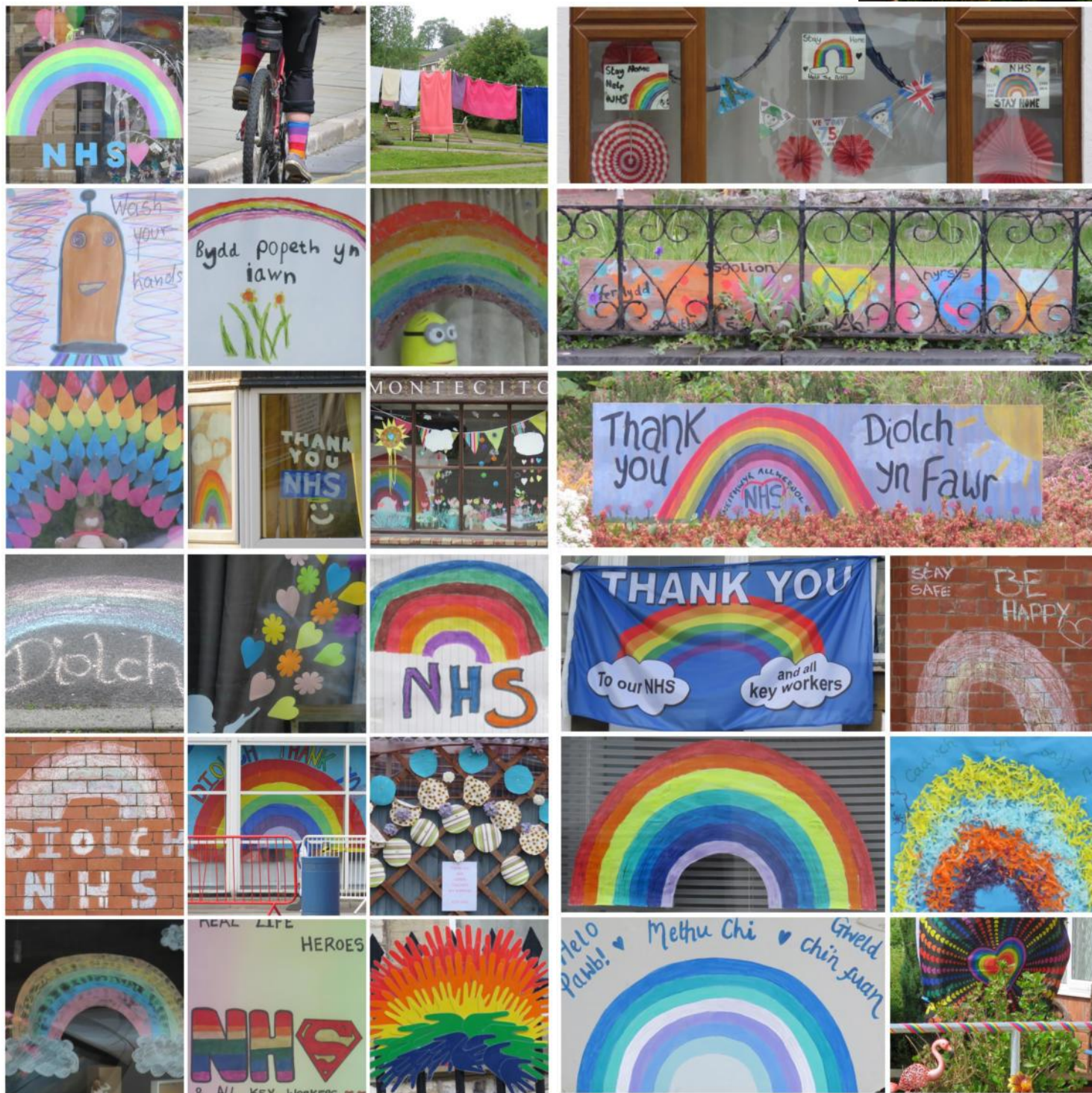
the other fell off at the wrist. It was a fortnight before...some of the wounds of the men had been looked at and dressed'. She removed maggots from the wounds in 'handfuls'.

Betsi worked night and day and made progress, despite intolerable problems. When Florence Nightingale came to inspect progress, she was impressed, and later reflected that Betsi was 'an active, respectable and hard working old woman with a foul tongue and a cross temper'. Perhaps she saw that there was some value in Betsi's more intuitive approach to nursing. Finally, however, this 'hard working old woman' herself caught both cholera and dysentery and had to return to London, where she died in 1860 and was buried in a pauper's grave at Abney Park Cemetery, Stoke Newington, now in the London Borough of Hackney.

Honour was finally given to this heroic, but largely forgotten woman. In 2016, she was named by the Western Mail as 'one of the greatest Welsh men and women of all time, along with Aneurin Bevan, the founder of the NHS. The Royal College of Nursing erected a headstone over her grave. 'She brought healing and comfort to the wounded during the Crimean War, and was ready to cut through regulations to give soldiers the treatment they deserved'. RCN Wales organises regular Betsi Memorial Lectures in Cardiff, Llangollen and Carmarthen. And the pop-up hospital in Llandudno, during Covid-19, was named Ysbyty Enfys. To name it 'Nightingale' would never have done!

Rainbow Warriors

Rainbows proliferated in and around Ruthin from week beginning March 22nd. They appeared first in parents' and grandparents' homes and were initially hand drawn and hand coloured. As the weeks progressed, not only did they become more elaborate, they became ubiquitous, alongside other signs of hope or thanks. At the time of writing, there are now so many that it's difficult to choose which to show. Here nevertheless is a selection of the large variety you see on your exercises, commercially and at homes.



Y Tabernacl

Yn ystod yr wythnos yn dechrau Ebrill 20ed, fe ymddangosodd y ddau fwrdd yma y tu allan i'r Tabernacl, Stryd y Ffynnon yn gofyn i blant lleol i binio eu lluniau. Wythnos yn ddiweddarach fe welsom galeri i loywi'r dref. Roedd Capel Bethania hefyd yn dangos rhai lluniau.



Rising to the Challenge

How have three of Ruthin's villages responded to the demands of the coronavirus? From a safe distance, Peter Daniels investigates

It's remarkable how the villages of Clawddnewydd, Clocaenog and Derwen have always enjoyed and maintained a high degree of community spirit and interdependency. In 2001, against the odds, it raised a significant sum towards a brand new community centre in Clawddnewydd. Several years later, it reopened the Clawddnewydd village shop. Perhaps the greatest achievement was the purchase for the community at an impossibly short 10 weeks of the Glan Llyn Inn.

The response to the rigours of coronavirus have not just been typical of the way in which the community works together, it has exceeded even their own high standards and expectations.

Early in the crisis, Antur Cae Cymro (the community venture responsible for the Glan Llyn Inn and Siop y Fro, Clawddnewydd) recognised that there were many in the community through age or illness who had to self-isolate or who feared making essential trips into town. When, on March 20th, the Welsh & UK governments closed the pubs, Antur Cae Cymro repurposed its bar staff to serve in the shop. This maintained income levels locally. It also hired some additional staff, as the shop expanded not just in size—it's now at least 50 per cent bigger—but also in terms of the range of goods on offer. To its credit, all those who

regularly staff the shop are waged. The shop has extended opening hours, for ten hours a day till 8p.m. The shop was also an early adopter of the now ubiquitous one-way customer system.

The shop range now goes well beyond the basic essentials once available. This includes some relatively exotic vegetables not previously stocked, such as courgettes and avocados. It now sells pre-packed fish. It is a hub for the collection of prescription medicines. It receives meats daily. Cotteswold Milk and the Village Bakery also drop daily and both will make a second pass if required.

Price's of Mold brings in vegetables. Ruthin's Bakehouse provides products such as home cooked pasties. Siwgar a Speis, Llanrwst, is another local supplier. Eggs are from Ty'n y Celyn, Clocaenog.

The emphasis is indeed on local suppliers, where possible. To supplement this, Siop Clawdd uses Tesco-owned Booker. Since January, because Booker now refuses to deliver, post-coronavirus, the usual weekly visit is now at least three times a week. It's between a 40 to 60 mile round trip to premises at Capenhurst or Rhostyllen. Here, the association operates in partnership with the community shop in Pwllglas, taking orders and delivering directly to the Pwllglas premises.

Bookers is often quite empty, however, and Antur Cae Cymro has used its connections within the pub trade to source goods in bulk and then to re-bag them in consumer quantities for general sale. So, at the time of writing, for example, Siop Clawdd is one of the few places in Britain where you can actually buy flour, bought in bulk but split into 2.2lb bags. You'll also find hand sanitiser, pasta and toilet paper, all products that were at the time in short supply elsewhere.

Using a dozen-and-a-half volunteers, it also began an audacious grocery delivery service, which now reaches as far as Melin y Wig, Cyffylliog, Llanellidan & Bryn SM, alongside the three core villages and their more outlying farms. Even one of Denbighshire Corporation Transport's own bus drivers now delivers food to self-isolating people rather than bringing people to supermarkets out of the rural area. This is a ground-breaking partnership between Antur Cae Cymro and the County Council. Deliveries are available during each weekday but Tuesdays are busy. Fridays, however, were described as "bonkers".



Siop y Fro, Clawddnewydd

Not only this, but the pub restaurant now offers takeaway food each night bar Sunday. It operates on a pay-and-collect principle and you need to secure a timeslot but will deliver chilled ready meals where necessary. It has a number of themed evenings. It is not unusual to sell up to 40 meals on Fridays or Saturdays; and Sunday lunches have reached 50.

We've already mentioned that the villages are very closely knit. But the changes Antur Cae Cymro has made resulted in a far greater reach within its core communities, with new faces in the shop and old faces repeating business as they discover the way in which the committee has expanded its range of goods & services. It would be unfair to suggest that coronavirus has resulted in unexpected benefits but Antur Cae Cymro has certainly risen to the challenge in serving its community at this time. It is exploiting new markets in ways previously unthought of. In fact, it has built on the self-reliance already very evident. It is a coronavirus success by any yardstick you might wish to use.

Village Owned Pub

As village pubs close at an alarming rate, in December 2013, in just under 10 weeks, locals in the Clawddnewydd, Clocaenog & Derwen areas had reached their target of £180,000 and had bought the Glan Llyn Inn, which otherwise would have ceased trading. £90,000 came from local fund-raising and Antur Cae Cymro secured a loan of £90,000 from the Welsh Council Voluntary Associations.

There followed a refurbishment to include a new decking area to the front, a new sports bar and refitted kitchen. The Glan Llyn now employs a full-time chef. Staff and volunteers are all local.

Expansion into the restaurant area



Zooming Around

Everything is zooming around with technology—including the Town Council, reports Heather Williams

It first started to become obvious that things might change for all of us in Ruthin when coronavirus was reported in the UK at the beginning of March. Ruthin Town Council, which had started to hold meetings in November 2019 at its new premises, The Old Courthouse/Yr Hen Lys, held a Council Meeting on March 16th. Seating for councillors was arranged to meet 'social distancing' requirements (a new expression which we've all got used to) and there was an additional agenda item 'Coronavirus'. At this meeting, along with others held by councils across the UK, the Town Council resolved to not hold meetings until further notice. It was also agreed that the Clerk and Old Courthouse Manager should work from home.

With no further meetings possible, the Mayor, Gavin Harris, wrote a message for the Ruthin Town Council website explaining that while as a council it would not meet face to face for the foreseeable future, councillors would keep in contact via email and utilise its Emergency Powers meeting structure for any pressing matters that arose. Councillors wanted to emphasise that they would continue to be contactable via phone and email to offer any support or assistance for local residents (search 'Ruthin Town Council' for its website where there are details). In addition, contact details were provided for key organisations.

Since then, the Mayor has provided a weekly update which is live on Facebook on Saturdays (5.30pm in Welsh and 6.00pm in English), which is also available on the website and as a PDF document. These updates provide

information about local support available and also snippets of interest e.g. activities undertaken to mark VE Day.

As it is not expected that council meetings will return to normal for some months, new regulations have been brought in by the Welsh Government to deal with the current situation, which will apply to all meetings held before 1 May 2021. This will allow for meetings to take place by telephone, Skype, Zoom (another new word in most people's vocabulary!) or any other facility which enables persons who are not in the same place to speak to and be heard by each other (whether or not they can see each other).

The legislation also removes the requirement for a council to hold an annual meeting in May 2020, so to allow the current chairman (in Ruthin, this is the Mayor) to continue on until the Annual Meeting in May 2021, although councils may elect a chairman at an earlier meeting should they wish to do so.

Here in Ruthin, the Town Council is gradually getting used to using the new technology. Meetings via Zoom (which is video technology allowing a number of people to meet/see each other and discuss issues), have been held with members of the Old Courthouse/Yr Hen Lys working group, which is helping to develop the future activities in the building. Working with DCC County Archives, Yr Hen Lys is seeking stories about lockdown and this challenging time from the Ruthin Community, for display in an exhibition later in the year to showcase peoples' contributions, which can be through art, poetry, writing, textiles, photography, videos, music etc. Kate is also looking for volunteers to help out when the building is up and running again. Contact for these activities is kate.harcus@theoldcourthouse.wales.

The Town Council held an 'ordinary' Council meeting on 18th May via Zoom.

Open Doors 2020-2021

The uncertainties of the past three months and with the distinct possibility that the requirement to distance will continue for the foreseeable future, the Civic Association has decided to cancel the September 2020 Open Doors event.

We shall be back in 2021 with what we aim to be a bigger & better event—pandemic and successive waves of covid-19 infection permitting.

The Civic Association has taken this decision at the point where we would otherwise start incurring costs.

The likely continued requirement for distancing is the prime consideration, of course. This would otherwise make the event very difficult for those property owners who volunteer their time and buildings. We have in mind the safety of volunteers and participants.

The Civic Association thanks all those who to date had willingly offered time and the promise of an open door or two, and we trust that everyone understands the reason for this decision.

Book Review

Fancy another good read while in lockdown?

In the 60s and 70s, we were buying mass-market Alistair MacLean page-turners by the paper mill load. These days, he's less in the limelight.

MacLean's "The Satan Bug" is typical of his works. A little light on character development, perhaps, but a clever plot, good story, brisk pace & attention to detail keep you guessing as to whodunit.



There's a relevancy to its time. Someone has stolen three phials of a germ warfare "bug" from the secret Mordon research centre (a thinly disguised Porton Down, even located in the same Wiltshire).

The bug itself is a re-engineered poliovirus. There are parallels with today: this highly virulent strain has the propensity to end the world. It's contagious and indestructible. Moreover, there's no vaccine.

Only Pierre Cavell and his "lovely wife" can save the world. His asperity, arrogance and contempt heroically outwit exclusively male & usually moustachioed soldiers, superintendents & scientists, whether heroes or villains. When this gets out, Cavell says, "I'll bet the headlines are the biggest since VE day".

It was originally published in 1962 and is littered with references to the height of the cold war tension of the time. These only date the book if you let it. There's talk, for example, of a Communist plot to destroy Britain.

For 45p, I bought my copy in 1974, at a period of détente. Much younger then, I agreed with Punch's endorsement that the book was "utterly compelling". Actually, to a youngster's imagination in the precariousness of the mid-70s, it was utterly terrifying. Re-reading it now and it's suddenly convincing that we should face a strain of something so destructive, so pernicious, that its consequences are staggeringly life-changing. You don't need to be a conspiracy theorists to appreciate the reasons why.

But this old school thriller has a happy ending, something in 2020 for which we continue to search & wait...

In Other News



partial culvert collapse after Storm Dennis on February 16th. The trunk road had been under temporary traffic signals.

The well-tended & well-watered flower border at the junction of Borthyn, Mwrog Street and Park Road is looking especially fine, this spring, providing a splash of colour to brighten our darker times.



It started in late February and finished just ahead of lockdown. The Leisure Centre was treated to an external paint-up.

And, a number of businesses in town have taken advantage of the lockdown to invite in the painters and decorators or



celebrating its 50th anniversary. 2020 is probably not the best year for that sort of commemoration.

Work at the Aldi site continues, even during the current first wave of the virus. There was some public disquiet about this but construction, of course, was always permitted. For those who were concerned, there were more who were looking forward to its completion. And, food retail provides (or in this case will provide) an essential service. Meanwhile, March saw builders' merchants and the Taylor Wimpey Glasdir sites closed... though they have since progressively reopened from April 27th.

to reorder or make more significant changes.

Examples include Choo Choo Etc Etc; Siop Elfair; Ruthin Kebab Well Street; W & G Jones café; Llewelyn-Jones; The Manorhaus; the nail bar on Clwyd Street; Beauty on the Square; and County Hall.

Fire damage to the waste transfer station



Completed just ahead of lockdown was the Children's Society frontage though, alas!, not the second & third floors, which remains in a poor visual condition.

On March 31st, a fire at the Ruthin Waste Transfer Station sent a plume of smoke over Ruthin for much of the day and destroyed part of the building.

Alton Murphy opticians is displaying signage



In more construction news, at the start of May, work began on enabling works for the £3m expansion at Ruthin Hospital. This is part of a £3m investment agreed in 2019. Eventually, Mount Street surgery will transfer to the site. It safeguards the hospital but moves the surgery away from the town centre.

Sunday April 12th saw the completion of works on Mwrog Street following the



Mwrog Street culvert



Eyes in the Back of your Head

Things are very different in May but back in the early days of lockdown, we were more cautious when we went outside.

When our governments instructed us we may leave our homes for one period of exercise per day, going out early seemed to be the safest time to do it.

In March, initially, there were few people about but, as the first weeks progressed, more and more people found themselves outside at the same time. The roads and streets are nothing like crowded, of course they're not, but, to maintain a safe physical distance, you now need to keep your wits about you. It's a little easier after



the change to British summer time—but people are now returning to early appearances. This means you dart to and fro, like a hurtling ball bearing in a life-size pinball machine. It's safest to widen your view around bends, for example, by crossing the road to see around the curve. Take the outside of that curve. At corners, use reflections in shop windows to get a forward indication of who's about. It's the pedestrian equivalent of being an advanced motorist. Sort of the walker's version of Information, Position, Speed, Gear (face-mask??), Acceleration.

High garden hedges obscuring junctions and driveways are particularly problematic. Go out early enough and you can walk down the centre even on main roads, giving you options to veer or back at need. Don't get caught walking next to pedestrian guard rails such as the sweep at the Craft Centre where there's nowhere to go. Watch out for narrow footpaths such as Lôn Speiriol; the path alongside the new Ysgol Penbarras; that between Trem Menlli & Bro Deg; the Cuning Green; from Cae Castan to Bryn Rhydd and farther to Erw Goch; at the side of Tesco by the allotments; from Mwrog Street to Llys Erw; and from Denbigh Road to Parc y Dre—to name a number.

And then there are runners. They can



sneak up behind you and, for this, you really need eyes in the back of your head. They creep up like a pantomime villain. There are also runners and runners. Walking along Ffordd Glasdir one morning, I actually found myself slowly and steadily catching up with a lumbering, ponderous, red-faced runner when, all of a sudden, the runner turned around and began labouring towards me.

As you pass someone at a distance, whatever else you do, always remember to say s'mae, hi or helo/hello; or bore da/good morning. Add a smile and wave. Little touches matter in difficult times. And that's one of the wonders of the age: stranger or not, most respond. That you won't always find in ordinary times.

Self-isolation

A miscellany by Derek Jones

● First things first. Newspaper, radio and television reports have been full of stories about caring for each other during the lockdown. Non-intrusive enquiries—how are we doing, anything you need?—have been the order of the day pretty well everywhere from Cornwall to the Shetland Islands. It's been the same here in Graigfechan, and we, like many others, have good friends and neighbours, who have done our shopping, collected prescriptions as well as stopping for a brief chat at the required distance, putting the world and the government to rights! Self-isolation definitely has its positive side.

● At the same time, it's been very noticeable how often people mention the difficulties of families elsewhere who live in tall blocks of flats, and who, until relatively late in the progress of the pandemic, have not been able to take the air, let alone having to keep small children indoors. I can't help feeling that the Civic Association, more than any other organisation concerned with the quality of life, might think more regularly about life in tower blocks. I can already

hear it being said 'but there aren't any here' and of course there aren't, but the word 'civic' points us to a wider concern for the places in which some of our fellow citizens are forced to live.

● Paradoxically, the pandemic may have made it possible for all of us to look sky-wards and be pleasantly surprised by a new sharpness of light. Such are the benefits of the reduction of air and car travel. Will it last? Or will we, as soon as we possibly can, revert to our polluting ways?

● Meanwhile, I hope people managed to see the 'Super Moon', absolutely huge, and, it seemed, close at hand, as if resting on the top of the Clwydians. On the other hand, we may perhaps recall what is now becoming a rubbish dump up there, littered as it is with several generations of discarded spacecraft, and no civic association to ask the Council to take any of it away!

● Self-isolation has meant that, as I write this, I have not seen Ruthin for seven weeks. It is, I gather, very quiet, and peaceful, but shoppers have seen the return of the queue, as people wait patiently and safely to be allowed into the supermarkets, food shops, the hardware shop (where the shopkeepers come to



the door and bring what you need without your crossing their threshold). Perhaps the prize for ingenuity ought to go to Castle Bell Newsagents who, although having closed the shop, have not only hugely expanded their round of deliveries, but more than tripled the range of goods that they have available and will add to your daily paper—from toilet rolls to soap, from toothpaste to kitchen rolls. While many have been in enforced idleness, Castle Bell has described their daily output as 'manic'. They deserve a medal! On May 22nd, Castle Bell announced that this service would cease, as other supply chains returned to normal. It also enabled Castle Bell to re-model its shop.

Take a Seat

A new reality at Plas Meddyg ensures our safety and that of staff, reports a RADCA member

It's a very different world. A rather scary world, actually. You enter as if on to an unfamiliar stage, perhaps the set of a sci-fi drama, where the usual reference points are all distorted.

Let me explain. There I was, and I need to speak to a GP. First, there's the telephone call. Later and I am engaged in a 17-minute telephone consultation with a doctor. But I need to be examined. This involves a visit. Doctor determines I am not likely to be covid-19 positive. Doctor reassures that it's safe to enter the surgery—in spite of my obvious anxiety at doing so.

The queue outside is prudently keeping apart much more than the prescribed



6'6", as if the mere fact of being there adds to the possibility of disease and pestilence. For all I know, patients have nothing more than smouldering dyspepsia or a crusty case of athlete's foot but the distance seems to be in proportion to the uncertainty we feel. There's an outside table at the entrance upon which a masked and aproned assistant places medicines. They're packed in their usual crisp paper bags of newly washed & ironed whites.

Seeing the doctor means by-passing the queue but, entering, it is impossible to maintain 6'6".

Inside, reception is ringed with chairs forming a makeshift barrier, as if the staff behind are rock stars at a concert. Facing the counter, the seats seem to pay homage to the NHS. It's impossible to get close. You bellow across the void. No secrets here, no discretion. Not that it matters. There's only one other patient within, nervously standing as far back as possible. It's unusually and unnervingly quiet, like pub closing time on a wintery Tuesday evening or December 27th in town. There are screens installed on the reception counter. No sign of any public hand sanitiser anywhere, though. That, no doubt, is reserved for doctors.

"Please take a seat". Although the chairs are now well spaced, sitting means you relinquish control over your personal space, especially as staff have to move around. I elect to stand.

A door opens. Out comes a patient from a consultation and involuntarily I withdraw, willing the wall to absorb me, as if recoiling as from a great aunt's carbolic-scented air kiss. The patient wears a full hard plastic face mask. Darth Vader and I lock eyes. I am tempted to ask him how goes the Empire but the frivolity doesn't match the sober atmosphere. His concealed face adds to the apprehension. I chastise myself as I



ask why I haven't been prudent enough to acquire a mask.

The buzzer goes and I walk to the doctor's door. I try to figure out whether it's safe to use the door handle when the masked doctor opens it for me with a hand of blue latex. No biological hazmat suit, which is a relief. No need to distance within the consultation room, either, for the doctor needs to examine me.

Departure time and there are a total of two patients waiting. They look relaxed and chat comfortably at a distance. The staff also seem at ease, as if there's really not quite enough work in the new reality where patients have forsaken them to suffer alone at home in their own quiet discomfort. Again, I wonder at how incomprehensible it is that there should be so few patients within.

Plas Meddyg made its changes early on in the virus' first wave and as such was an exemplar. I am grateful. But probably not as appreciative as the doctors, nurses and staff more at risk than me.

Meanwhile, the construction work to increase the consultation space, which started in early February and was due to finish mid-March is now inevitably postponed.

Who was Fred Walmesley?

Asks Gwynne Morris

Much good work has recently been carried out by the enthusiastic group 'Friends of Old St. Peter's' of Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd in renovating the church and its surroundings. The church which stands on the hillside opposite the old Rectory dates back from as long ago as the 13th century. It was abandoned, however, in 1864, when the parish constructed the present church, built at the expense of John Jesse, who lived at Llanbedr Hall. The reason for its closure was that its cemetery was becoming full.

There exists a very interesting painting of the old church signed on the lower left side by a Fred Walmesley and dated

1894. The question which arises is who was Fred Walmesley and what connection did he have with the area? It turns out that thirteen years earlier the 1881 census shows a fifteen year old boy of this name lived at H.M. Prison, Ruthin, being the son of James and Hannah Walmesley. James was the prison Governor, while his mother Hannah was registered as being the Matron. By the 1891 census, Fred was registered as being a Landscape Artist who lived as a boarder (lodger?) at 'Freezeland' Cilcen (sic) Road, Mold, Holywell, Flintshire. The transcripts of old censuses often have spelling mistakes. The name of the house turns out to be 'Friesland'. By 1901, he had moved to Portsmouth and was still at 35 years a bachelor. By

1906, however, he was married to a 34 year old local spinster, a Kate Anne Thornley. By profession he remained as a Scenic Artist and C&C. What did the C&C stand for?



Seen in Passing...

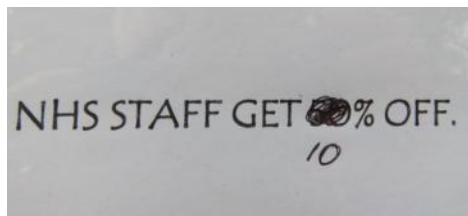
Here, we look at some of the more off-beat moments locally during the first three months of the coronavirus crisis...



Amid the rainbows, the signage supporting the NHS and the messages in the towns windows beseeching us to stay at home, this was the only descending voice we've seen in Ruthin. It is still on Rhos Street.



When it comes to social distancing, these GPO telephone engineers have found a new way to do it, seen on Denbigh Road.



One of our businesses now offers a takeaway service but obviously had second thoughts about offering a 50 per cent discount to NHS staff.

Recently, handwritten below the window bills in one of our salons was a note stating, 'For an emergency contact, please call 07....' Presumably that would be a medial emergency, right? Or perhaps a split nail? It is thanks to the salons in town that the

coronavirus notices add a human touch, like, 'My heart is broken but is also so full from the support and I cannot thank every single person enough'. Many other businesses simply offer information only.



An excellent idea. Appeared for a short while on Wernfechan was this box of free books, with the invitation to take one if you feel bored. One such book had the rather threatening title, "When You Dead, You Dead".



The stickers "Back Off" and "Keep your Distance" as seen on this car on the Square in May were just made for lockdown, don't you think. Not that it would seem that everyone was taking the owner's advice, judging by the rusty gouge above the number plate.



The closure of public lavatories resulted in this sign on the Market Street, which reads, "Apologies for any inconvenience caused".



Is W & G Jones butchers moving into the female accessory business with this line in chicken fillets?



The Archive closed on March 19th but, as this picture seems to indicate, one month later, their was still an "inmate" lurking within and trying to break out.



In the picture framers on Mwrog Street near Pont Howkin is this frame with a single sheet of lavatory paper, which reads, "Break Glass in an Emergency".



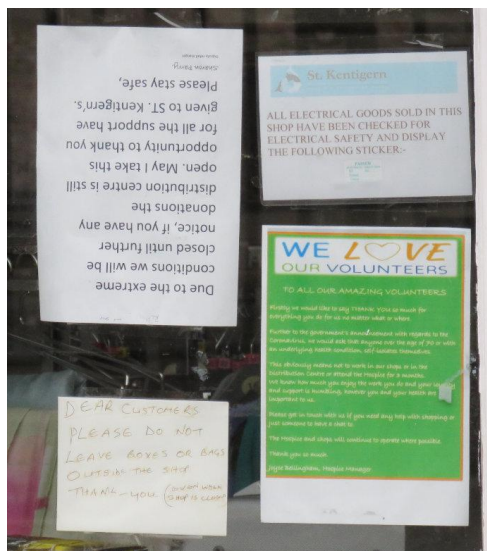
Door-to-door salespeople: you've been warned to stay at home.

In Passing... continued

Thank heavens for the internet in these difficult times. What would we do without it. We hear on the wireless that we are compelled to keep 2m apart from everyone. I've checked online to determine exactly how far away 2m actually is. It saves searching for a conversion table and a slide rule. 2m is apparently 6'6". Why don't they just say so? Anyway, now we know.

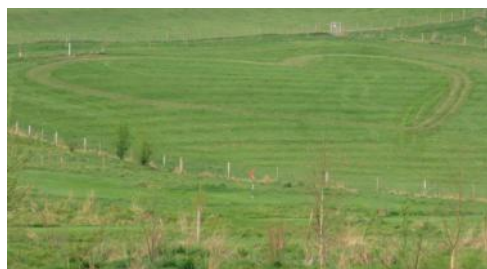


It seems that I am not the only person uncomfortable with the metric system. Amid this wonderful caricature of hard-working, front-line staff at the Well Street pharmacy, above, is a revision to the Governments' distancing requirements. Unless, of course, Well Street Pharmacy has simply misunderstood that advice!



It appears that staff at St Kentigern's left in such a hurry that they affixed their coronavirus notice upside down. It's now rectified.

Cut above the Centre, Llanfwrog in March was this giant heart.



10 Years Ago

The Guardian newspaper featured Ruthin, describing it as "a small, magical place not on the way to anywhere. Ruthin feels a bit like a lost world. It requires seeking out. Thank goodness it's worth it. Imagine traipsing and tramping, only to arrive at Pinner or Slough".



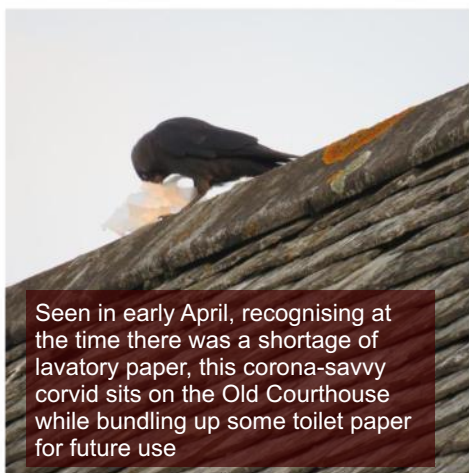
The author goes on, "Weirdest of all, this all-alone town has lately attracted those totems of the 21st century, a lauded restaurant, a boutique hotel and, in the National Craft Centre, the architectural avant garde. A very, very odd mix. I like it."

Then, though, there is the case against. "Magical or not, it's a very small town, with all the parochialism that entails"

Perhaps the Guardian was referring to the ill-feeling in June 2010 between Ysgol Brynhyfryd and its sixth-formers, who were no longer allowed to drive onto and park within school premises.

Or the ensuing argument between school and residents of Bryn Eryl who complained that sixth formers were now forced to park inconsiderately in a residential area. The eventual solution, of course, was a modification to the school site to accommodate sixth-form drivers but that wasn't instant. Till then, there remained some bitterness among Years 12 and 13—who are now 27.

Nevertheless, the Guardian concluded, "Thankfully, the countryside is so mesmerising round here that even a drive to the council tip would be captivating." Now that in 2020 the site is open again, we can all now check the veracity of that claim.



Seen in early April, recognising at the time there was a shortage of lavatory paper, this corona-savvy corvid sits on the Old Courthouse while bundling up some toilet paper for future use



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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 (tel. 704256). The deadline for the next edition is August 16th, 2020.

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Peter Daniels, Derek Jones and Heather Williams & Anonymous; and with the help of Harold Jones, Catrin Griffiths, Anna Lloyd & Eryl Williams.

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