

Ruthin Town & Around O Gwmpas y Dre

March 2021

Quarterly comment & features from the Ruthin & District Civic Association

Time to Restore the Town Clock?



townandaround.org.uk/historic/peers.htm

by Fiona Gale

In recent months, a group of local people have come together in Ruthin with the aim of developing a project and seeking funding to repair and conserve the Peers Memorial or Ruthin Town Clock as it is perhaps better known in St Peter's Square. Nearly twelve years ago, Gwynne Morris wrote a piece for Town and Around outlining some of the history of the monument which he expanded in a publication for the Ruthin Local History Group. Much of the historical detail below is thanks to Gwynne Morris.

It is a structure that most of us will have hurried past many times, perhaps glancing up to check the time: are we on time for that optician's appointment? Have I got time to grab a quick coffee? Or should I be heading home? Or maybe you've sat on its bench seats on a summer's day chatting with friends (oh for those days again!). It is a building that is synonymous with Ruthin, illustrated in much of the tourist literature for the town as well as in graphics for the new 'Stori Rhuthun' project, and yet I imagine few people stop and look closely at it or

even wonder why it is there. Its importance is recognised nationally, however, by the fact that it is listed Grade II.

The Clock Tower was completed in 1883 and is a memorial to the 83 year old Joseph Peers who had been a popular



Vegetation on the Memorial

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Moving On

The active travel scheme has come and almost gone. Your Committee felt that it was a venture worth pursuing and should at least be extended to the summer, to allow for businesses to spill over on to the new pedestrian space. Only then, when lockdown might be over, could we really see the scheme's benefits for those who walk around town.

It was not to be. It rather polarised opinion. We have a feeling that there is a silent majority who are less used to the tussles we see on social media.

Excusing the pun, the town now needs to move on. But that should not mean the scheme's removal should put paid to the prospects of other active travel solutions. So, the Denbighshire press release on the removal states, 'We support the aspirations of this scheme. However, as a member area group, we felt it wasn't the right scheme for the town'.



'There is still the need to consider how pedestrians use the Square', RADCA Chair, Anne Roberts MBE, said.

She continued, 'The Ruthin and District Civic Association has a long held aspiration to give pedestrians a higher priority across the whole Square, from the Courthouse to the Church. This does not necessarily mean pedestrianisation but a shared space that allows those on foot to enjoy the top of town. The Market Town of the Future exercises have also shown that the people of Ruthin wish to see some sort of change and the freeing of some roadspace at the top of town for more imaginative uses.

'It would be a shame if the removal of the recent active travel measures sets this ambition back'.

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townandaround.org.uk

The Big Ruthin Quiz: details back page

Peers Memorial

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Clerk of the Peace for the County of Denbigh for 50 years. It was built in his lifetime, although he died in January 1884 shortly after it was completed and he is buried at Llanfwrog. The tower contains a sculpted likeness of Joseph Peers which was made by a Mr Griffiths of Chester and it is described as being 'a good likeness of the man'. It also has sculptures of St David and St George, a dolphin and an inscription. Colonel Cornwallis-West of Ruthin Castle was chair of the committee who chose the design, which may be why John Douglas, a renowned architect of Chester, was chosen. He had previously carried out commissions for Colonel Cornwallis-West. Douglas was known for using a mixture of different stones in his buildings, particularly mixing limestone and sandstone which can be seen in the Peers Memorial here in Ruthin. It is thought the stone was supplied by Charles Thomas of Llys Cadw quarry Gwespyr, Llanasa. The original design for the tower had a circular water trough around the base. This was not constructed, although the drinking fountain trough and a trough for water for horses/dogs were built and can still be seen today. The building had a water supply and gas, as gas lamps were located on either side. Originally, the clock was a mechanism which would have been wound by hand. It was converted to electricity a number of years ago.

If you take a closer look at the Peers Memorial, you will notice that time has taken its toll. It is basically in a sound condition and it is not going to fall down, but some of the stone has been damaged. Particularly the sandstone string courses and some other areas show signs that the stone is laminating... the surface layers are coming off and in places larger sections have disappeared... plants are growing out of the structure, never a good sign as this means water can get into the masonry joints which in time does further damage.

In the autumn of 2020, a local group was set up, Grŵp Adfer Cloc Rhuthun, with the express aim of bringing the monument back to its former glory. The aim is not to change it at all: good conservation work is not about drastic change and is often not obvious to many passers by, but does ensure a building can continue in a good condition into the future. A programme of repair and re-

consolidation is needed. The local group, of which I am the chair, is made up of local residents, historians, town councillors and specialists and is formally supported by Ruthin Town Council. Through a quirk of history, the Peers Memorial is owned by Denbighshire County Council who is also very supportive.

Obviously to carry out a programme of repair and conservation work needs money. The group has lots of enthusiasm and knowledge but no funding, as yet. It is proposed to develop a two staged programme with Phase 1 being an information & permission gathering, by the end of which the detail of what needs to be done, how much it costs and any necessary consents will be in place such that all the information needed for a funding application for Phase 2 to undertake the

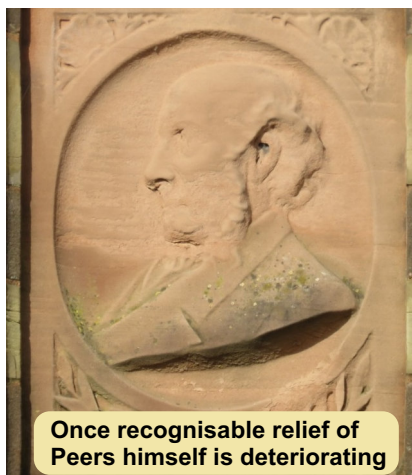
conservation work can take place. We are at the Phase 1 stage now, having ascertained who owns the structure. Denbighshire County Council has agreed to part-fund this first stage and an application is going to the Clocaenog Windfarm Fund to match this, along with Ruthin Town Council.

Fingers crossed we are successful and the work can begin to design a scheme to conserve the Clock Tower. In this first phase, if we are successful, there will be a chance for the public to get involved to find out more about the monument and the developing proposals. Should we be able to move onto Phase 2, there will be the opportunity for much more educational and public involvement. As a group, we hope to be able to report back in due course that the project is going ahead. We are aiming for 2023,

the 140th anniversary of the building of the Peers Memorial, for a reopening ceremony to celebrate the newly refurbished Clock Tower. And, if you know anything further about the memorial and its history, please get in touch.



Evidence of weathering



Once recognisable relief of Peers himself is deteriorating

Who was Joseph Peers?

At the time of his death, the Free Press said of Joseph Peers, Esq, 'He was a true and noble specimen of what a fine British gentleman should be'.

Born November 30th, 1800, he lived at Plas Newydd, Llanfwrog. He was articled to well-known local solicitor and Clerk of the Peace John Jones. On February 2nd, 1833, in succeeding Jones, Peers was himself conferred Clerk of the Peace for Denbighshire. Peers retained this role for an astonishing 50 years, eight months and three days. Peers is said to have been absent only four times in 200 Quarter Sessions.

In his early life, it is reported that Peers suffered an injury that resulted in the loss of the use of this left hand. He is said to have replaced his hand with a hook.

In 1855, his wife Caroline and only son Joseph died, three months apart.

Alongside his 'ardent interest in all county matters and among the many public positions of honour he occupied', Peers was a colonel of the Yeomanry. More locally, he filled the office of mayor of Ruthin on several occasions 'with distinction and honour'. It is also said that he was 'instrumental in promoting the welfare of the town and its residents in the workhouse'.

The Free Press gave Peers an effusive obituary. 'As Clerk of the Peace... his opinions on all legal and county matters were trusted and taken as the best that could be given; and it was astounding to notice how his decisions were respected in the Court... By the Bar he was much esteemed'.

It was a sign of the 'true and tender regard' felt for Peers by Ruthinians and the whole county that there was installed 'that very handsome public memorial'.

As a mark of respect, all shops closed on the day of the funeral of this 'man of great ability in his profession, a painstaking, clear-thinking and able man in his particular sphere, and one looked up to and whose opinion had the greatest weight'. He was said to be 'kind, courteous and gentlemanly in the extreme, a friend worth making & retaining'.

Peers died on January 21st, 1884, aged 83. The Free Press predicted that Peers would long be remembered and, indeed, his name continued to crop up in the paper long after his death. It is fitting that 140 years later the town should again commemorate his name by assembling a package for the restoration of his memorial.

Active Travel in Ruthin

Bobby Feeley offers a personal view on the short history of the active travel scheme

On the May 7th, 2020 the Welsh Government invited all local authorities in Wales to put forward expressions of interest to introduce temporary 'pop-up' safety measures to enable safe social distancing in town centres when pandemic restrictions were lifted and when shops and businesses were allowed to reopen. These measures could include footway widening, temporary cycle lanes and speed/one-way restrictions.

The LAs had only two weeks to submit bids, leaving little time for meaningful consultation to gauge the opinion of councillors. By the time the Ruthin Members' Area Group (MAG), which includes the three local Ruthin county councillors, next met the Denbighshire bid had been successful and funding allocated.

The Welsh Government wanted new measures introduced in the summer of 2020, to coincide with the restrictions lifting. This was an impossibly tight schedule if proper consultation was to take place within the community.

After a discussion in the MAG, it was decided to have a robust engagement plan in July to give as many people as possible the chance to consider the proposed new active travel scheme. Ruthin Town Council took a very proactive, positive stance in support and the consultation proved pretty successful, with around 600 respondents, 80 per cent of whom were in favour. It has to be said the scheme was not received well in some towns in Denbighshire, with Prestatyn and Denbigh deciding at the outset not to proceed.

Here in Ruthin, however, we decided we would support the proposals and the Lead Member Transport, Councillor Brian Jones, gave the go-ahead to install the temporary measures, including a one-way system, on parts of Market Street and Well Street. This enabled the pavement areas to be widened temporarily.

This was installed in October 2020 and a 'community feedback' study commenced in early December to monitor how well the scheme was operating.

Unfortunately, immediately after the installation, there was a large volume of responses across social media, which were hostile and angry. In addition, many residents and businesses also voiced their disapproval, disliking the new measures. On a personal note, I have encountered very few people who like the black bollards straddling our pretty mediæval town and they have proven to be totally impractical and even hazardous. The streets are too narrow and hilly and several people (including myself) have tripped. Fortunately, no

serious injuries resulted.

We held a meeting on site before Christmas and watched as a delivery lorry failed to negotiate the bend on Market Street and almost destroyed one of the trees. In addition, people walked or drove past, expressing strong disapproval. Delivery vans have found it difficult to access their destinations and in Well Street we realised there would be a problem to hold funerals in Pendref Chapel, without causing traffic congestion. Small businesses in the area, and residents, who possibly welcomed the scheme initially, were no longer supportive.

As we now all know, the virus-related restrictions were not lifted for long and most shops and businesses have remained closed so, unfortunately, few people have actually returned to the town centre, which was the original reasoning behind the scheme.

In January, the three local members met with the officers who had drawn up the scheme to see if we could do anything to improve the situation without abandoning it altogether but it was difficult to find a suitable compromise. At the MAG meeting in January, the DCC officers informed us we could not even keep the one-way system, because the necessary process for installing it permanently had not taken place. That left us no alternative but to recommend complete removal.

Later in January, we discussed the situation again and informed the Lead Member, Brian Jones, of our wish to remove the scheme, after which he made a decision in principle to abandon it. Naturally, this was subject to evaluation after the conclusion of the consultation on January 31st, 2021.

I must emphasise Denbighshire County Council will continue with its active travel plans and are currently working on a number of projects to improve routes in Ruthin and across the county. We will continue to engage with the various cycle and walking groups.

We have been advised the Welsh Government will unlikely claw back funding and I'm sure there will be other uses for the materials removed, with any money left likely to be spent on other active travel schemes. It is a great shame this funded programme has not worked out. I think the intentions were good but, sadly, the scheme was not right for Ruthin.



Feedback

Here's a summary of direct feedback received after December 2020's edition. Three names/email addresses supplied.

'Please Get Rid of It'

The the one way system is ugly. Ruthin is a pretty, small, town and these awful bits of street-furniture tat (with embarrassing horticultural attempts sitting atop them) are a vulgar eyesore. It is not necessary. (I walk up Market Street daily, (where I live) and have been watching carefully and so far have not seen a single bicycle use the cycle lane). It is environmentally unfriendly. When I have journeyed by car up to St Peter's Square, I have simply driven directly up Market Street. Now, I have to turn left, drive down Wynnstay Road, turn right, then drive up Wells St. A small increase for one person and one journey, but multiplied by all such transport across months and years, this increases motor pollution considerably.



'Not Feeling Guilty'

Theoretical vaccination passport at the ready and I am no longer going to feel guilty about visiting or shopping in Mold. Mold is better on foot, is easier to move around and blocks off its High Street twice a week. If Ruthin cannot get it right, why bother to shop exclusively here?

Here we are, in the teeth of a renewed spread of the new variant of the virus, where news gets blacker day the day, by the hour, and we're about to remove the one measure that helps keep us safe while walking around town, at exactly the wrong moment.

I was really looking forward to seeing whether the town would take advantage of the scheme over the summer just like Mold does on market days. Wednesdays and Saturdays in Mold now suddenly seem so much more appealing.

'Gallic Shrug'

Here's an example of why we need this scheme. I was caught on Clwyd Street between a rock and a hard place with nowhere to go to keep 2m apart.

I had stepped slightly into the road when a car on the opposite side came too fast down the hill. He actually accelerated close by. There was significant room for him but this didn't prevent him raising his arms in a Gallic shrug to express his disgust. He effectively lost control of his vehicle for several seconds and at the speed he was doing placed me in danger.

Flooding Returns to Clwyd Street

On Wednesday January 20th, North East Wales reportedly saw a month's worth of rain in one day. On that morning, there were already signs that the river was starting to overflow in areas of Cae Ddol and the adjoining field. And more rain was forecast from Storm Christoph for the rest of the day.

By the afternoon, photographs on social media revealed the situation had dramatically worsened, with extensive flooding in the park. As darkness fell, the water breached the defences and it quickly started to surge towards properties in the Mill Street and the bottom of Clwyd Street. The water seeped into houses and then rapidly swelled. Those knocking on doors were soon waist-deep. By 7pm, up to three feet of water had poured into properties and businesses, with one resident describing it like a scene from the Titanic. It had taken barely half an hour to reach this peak. The river level was approximately 1' to 6" below the flood defences at the BP garage and also at the River Clwyd bridge on Park Road by Richard Williams. Pont Howkin did not get over-topped, though.

The river levels stabilised and thick snowflakes appeared. North Wales Police, the Fire & Rescue Service and Denbighshire County Council staff took action on the scene around the flooded properties. The Fire Brigade said that 15 properties were flooded and they used boats to evacuate eight people from their homes in Ruthin and a further 10 people 'self-evacuated', as they put it. The County Council established the emergency shelter at the Ruthin Leisure Centre but this closed by 11pm. There were numerous offers of help, which were gratefully appreciated, which shows the strength of the community in the town. These even included accommodation but evacuated residents were able to stay with family members for the night.

Memories of 20 years ago surged back, alongside the water. Nervous residents of Park Road and Mwrog Street were making preparations in case of flooding. I.T. Williams promptly distributed over



On February 15th, NRW began mitigation at Cae Ddol

400 sandbags and, when Williams ran out of bags, left sand for residents to fill their own. Williams also kindly provided a skip for affected residents and the Town Council agreed to provide two more. Other businesses offered help including Huws Gray & Tesco. The Town Council also agreed to investigate the most appropriate means of establishing a fund to support those affected by the floods. There was so much furniture offered that the Town Council wasn't sure what to do with it.

It was not only residents who were affected. It was also businesses, such as Tommy's Hair Company and Ocean Pearl. Tommy's commented that everything on the ground floor was lost and padding on the walls had soaked the walls up to about 6'.

Denbighshire County Council staff were also fearful of the damage they might find at the Ruthin Archives/Gaol. They were relieved that, although the water did flood the basement of the gaol, the unique and priceless archive collections managed to escape without damage. Some conservation supplies and equipment had been lost and some of the building's heating and cooling machinery damaged, but all those were replaceable.

Roger Connah of Mill Street was reported in the press as saying that he was on the flood committee after the floods 20 years ago and that they had said over the years the defences weren't enough and needed to be raised.



Tide mark on the Porth y Dŵr wall suggests water here was over 2' above the road surface. Mill Street saw up to 3'-worth of water

Defining Feature

Is flooding now a defining feature of Ruthin? Climate change may ensure that this remains the case for the foreseeable future, with all the human misery that will bring us.

The main difference between the 2021 Clwyd Street floods and those of 2000 and 2001 was that, this time, we could all watch the tragedy unfold on social media, together with voices of sympathy, concern and even banality. Even back to the Glasdir floods of 2012, with social media still in its infancy, the Free Press produced a rare mid-week special, which was one last throw of the die for local print media at being first with the news.

It was largely thanks to social media that, less than half-an-hour after the fire brigade was called, coronavirus-unhealthy numbers were sweeping down Clwyd Street. They began to gather at the water's edge. There was a similar assembly on the other side, to witness history. Aside from the two Christmas markets, it was probably the busiest that Clwyd Street had been since lockdown.

The high surge took just half-an-hour and fell again within a short period of time. It is believed that the water came to Mill Street & Clwyd Street around the back via Crispn Yard. There was no evidence to suggest that Pont Howkin had over-topped or that the water had carried any effluent.

Since 2000, there have been a number of flood events in the vicinity of Clwyd Street. The Park Place has suffered, for example. Mercifully, we have not seen the widespread flooding we witnessed in 2000 and 2001—till January this year, of course. It's 90 years since the major flood of 1931.

Publicly at least, property owners seemed largely stoical about the breach. A number expected further flooding, at some point. Home and business owners must nevertheless be wondering what the future holds. In 2007, 2014, 2019 and 2020 there had been a number of near misses, when properties were almost flooded.

Understandably, there are calls to build up the bunds in Cae Ddol. Physics being physics, this may then impact on the potential for flooding at Pont Howkin.

No doubt the relevant authorities will now be reviewing the situation after this latest flood in the town... and on February 15th we saw work begin to raise the Cae Ddol bund.

To make a donation via BACS

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Analysis: Rainfall & Flooding in Ruthin

An evaluation and examination by Brian Hubble

2000, 2001, 2012, 2021. Why is it that periodically some properties in Ruthin are flooded?

Ruthin itself is not subject to high precipitation. Our town lies in the almost-enclosed Vale, so all winds other than from the NNW arrive as descending air, which warms adiabatically, modifying the regional rising and rainfall associated with cyclonic fronts. Therefore, the rainfall in town (annual mean c.700mm or 28") is much less than on the Clocaenog moors and it is this precipitation over the higher headwaters of the Afon Clwyd which initiates flooding.

The flow of the Afon Clwyd fluctuates quickly in response to changes in the weather. It, and its many small tributaries, originate on the high ground to east and west, where the impermeable Silurian rocks generate rapid run-off, especially when the upland soils are saturated from previous rain or snow.

The limestone and sandstone rocks of the Vale itself are more permeable, but their outcrops are limited in area, and a thin cover of glacial till and river alluvium much reduces their absorbency.

The vulnerability of Ruthin by Pont Howkin is that, having left its hill stage after Eyarth Gorge, and collected, via the Afon Hesbin, water from the southern Clwydians, Afon Clwyd encounters its true floodplain at Cae Ddol, only to come across the low ridge followed by Clwyd and Mwrog Streets as well as the urban landscape which together form an impediment to excess water. At the same location, the sometimes lively culverted stream under Mwrog Street feeds into the Clwyd.

Just over ten years ago, I invested in a modest electronic weather station which includes a facility to save all records to a PC, which I have done continuously since 2010.

On Wednesday January 20th, 2021, storm Christoph gave 44.7 mm of rain in 24 hours (the second highest in 10 years) and up in the hills it may have been twice that amount. 17mm of this fell between 12 noon and 3pm. The resultant surge led to the flooding by Crispin Yard and Mill Street four hours later. However, this amount might have been harmless but for the fact that the catchment's ground was already saturated. The 139mm which fell in December 2020 was nearly twice the monthly average, and the first 19 days of January 2021 gave us 73mm, more than the mean for the whole month. So, the rain had nowhere to go, other than direct run-off into the

Clwyd river system.

In contrast, the highest 24-hour total I have recorded was 55.5mm on June 11th/12th, 2019. There was some minor flooding, mainly along the Dwr lâl, but the town escaped as the precipitation during May was only 39mm, well below the mean, so along with summer evaporation there was a more gradual release of water into the river system. Even so, the river channel was at bankful, but not overtopping.

Similarly, Storm Angus on November 21st, 2016 deposited 43.2 mm on our garden, but after a very dry autumn (only 63mm fell in the whole of September and October), the river channel was able to cope.

In another scenario, up to January 17th, 2016, rain was recorded on 84 of 87 days and, although 33mm fell on January 12th, the river just about remained within its banks, maybe as the rain was spread more evenly throughout the day without damaging surges.

As for the Glasdir Floods of November 27th, 2012, rain from a series of lively depressions during the preceding week culminated overnight of 26th/27th, when I recorded 28.9 mm. This was not an exceptional amount but with the land saturated and rivers full, there was nowhere for it to go. The Glasdir development was submerged and the flood plain doing what nature created it for.

I do not have weather records for the even more devastating November 6th, 2000 flooding, but we did have exceptionally high rainfall for many



preceding days.

Of course, flooding is not just a function of rainfall. In 2000 and 2001, a blockage of the culvert under Mwrog Street was a contributory factor, as was some of the flow of the Clwyd reverting to the old Mill Race above Mill Street. In 2012, the blockage of the culvert under the new Ffordd Glasdir (which itself forms a dam across the floodplain) exacerbated the situation, though it was probably debris carried by the early stages of the flood which caused the blockage. On the other hand, this year's January flood was more restricted in area, because the recent control measures, especially the Llanfwrog relief channel, appear to have functioned well.

Finally, a reminder that not all flooding comes from cyclonic rainfall and rivers. I remember an occasion one Monday in 1995 when torrential convective rain (as I have never seen in the UK before or since) from an apocalyptic thunderstorm caused a flash flood at the Anchor corner. I spent the evening helping the landlord of the Feathers to save his furniture!



Velodrome: latest

In spite of 'slow and steady progress' on the continued possibility of a Ruthin velodrome for North Wales, there has nevertheless been a change of emphasis.

The initial plan was to construct the velodrome near the Glasdir housing estate on land currently used as a football training pitch. This was the preferred site of four under consideration.

The relative merits of one site over others has now changed. Whether through the renewed post-virus importance of open & recreational space in the vicinity of the football pitches near Glasdir; or the mere pragmatism in terms of the velodrome's future operations, the preferred site is now adjacent to Ysgol Brynhyfryd. We suspect the latter.

The Town Council's role initially was simply to seize the moment. If there was to be a cycling facility in North Wales, why not in Ruthin?

This, then, was an opportunity that might benefit the town economically. Alongside Welsh Cycling, the Town Council set about fostering and facilitating.

But, as the project progressed, it became apparent that someone had to follow through in terms of running the

venture. This, apparently, wasn't to be Welsh Cycling. A community council was hardly in a position to do so. Hence, the Town Council has found a receptive ear (so far at least) from Denbighshire Leisure Ltd, the year-old arms-length sport & fitness trading branch of the County Council. Hence the renewed interest in the Brynhyfryd site.

So far, the school has been positive but there still remain issues about the possibility of disruption of the delivery of the school's PE curriculum and, ultimately, governors will be able to veto the proposal if they choose.

Those who live in Parc Brynhyfryd along the boundary with the school fields are unlikely to be wholly content.

They objected to the all weather pitch conversion when planning permission was sought in 2014. They may not take kindly to a new structure in their midst, in spite of its promised low angle, which is said to be no higher than the current hedge and fence lines for what will be a sunken facility.

There will nevertheless be the expected noise and loss of amenity as a result of the development, if it goes ahead there (or at all).

It must be stressed that the velodrome is not a foregone conclusion.

Stori Rhuthun

Ruthin Town Council has now embarked on Stori Rhuthun, a project that is largely self-explanatory.

The 'Stori Rhuthun' Facebook page encourages people to share photos and locations of heritage that surround us. There is an opportunity to ask and answer questions relating to our heritage.

There are plans, though, to widen this to those in isolation or who do not use the internet at all.

The National Lottery funding already received will in the spring therefore begin to deliver a more accessible community heritage project. There are promises of digital stories using 'The Book of You' bookofyou.co.uk. Some of the initial focus will be on retail in Ruthin and on Ysgol Borthyn.

Other avenues under consideration include story telling in the Castle stone circle & possibly café or even phone heritage sessions. Search Facebook for 'Store Rhuthun' for details or contact kate.harcus@theoldcourthouse.wales.

■ Yr Hen Lys is also looking for volunteers to 'staff' the building over the summer (virus permitting). It is intended to make the premises available seven days a week. If you're interested, please also contact Kate.

Castle Concerns

You really have to feel sorry for the new owners of Ruthin Castle.

Over the past 18 months, they have overseen a welcome investment in facilities. The gym and spa has been given a makeover. Rooms have been upgraded or brought into use. The owner has redecorated much of the reception and public areas. There's a new woodlands walk to a separate entrance for the gym, which means townsfolk no longer need use the main reception area, seen by some as a little intimidating. Much more is promised, including more rooms brought into use.



The two lions on their teal plinths stand guard over a cheerless empty car park

Above all, we now have Tafarn y Ddraig, said to be a welcome addition to the mid-range restaurant offer in Ruthin. With the decision to close On the Hill, such a development must be welcomed. Things may change, of course, but the plan always was to open Tafarn y Ddraig daily, even on days when other facilities were often closed.

Then, along comes a public health emergency, closing the Castle twice, once immediately after the launch of Tafarn y Ddraig this autumn, before the crucial Christmas market. It hardly had any time to establish itself. The Castle currently has no income from any of its business cost centres.

Of course, the Castle is far from unique.

We can paint the same picture across Ruthin and district's hospitality sector. But what is distinct is the setting and the fabric of its buildings.

Without income, the Castle's management can hardly play a role in ensuring the upkeep of its substantial and dare we say deteriorating assets.

There is evidence of some recent further decay along the limestone wall to the right as you enter the estate. At the nearby well, there appears to be yet more collapsed wall.

Then, more seriously, there have been

reports of two collapses associated with the gatehouse, both in January 2021. The second saw masonry fall onto Castle Street itself. It's uncertain whether the gatehouse is in the full care of the Castle or the trust.

Close by, a tree came down in the September winds and the clear up operation might actually have provided an opportunity to create a path down to the mediæval curtain wall.

On a happier note, the Civic Association was recently pleased to support the Castle Trust in the application for a grant towards benches within the Italianate Garden. With the Castle owners & management very keen to work with and



alongside the town to the point not previously seen in recent times, if at all, this is a welcome move for those residents or visitors who appreciate the conservation gardens. But what we now need is as swift as possible return to trading at the Castle, so that the forlorn emptiness of the place can again generate the income necessary at least to stabilise its estate.

Work Now Complete on Wynnstay House

Fiona Gale recounts the long road to saving Wynnstay House, from purchase, to discovery, to recovery and occupancy

Wynnstay House in Well Street Ruthin is half of what was The Wynnstay Arms Hotel. It is a listed building, Grade 2, and the listing says it is thought to have been built in 1549, although where that date came from is anyone's guess. The pub closed in 2011 and initially was let as a single dwelling but later divided into two, with one half operating as a bed & breakfast and the other half as self catering accommodation.



We bought Wynnstay House, the upper half of the building next to Wayfarer Wool Shop, in early 2016, although we only actually moved into it in the late summer of 2020! We were not able to start work right away, as we needed to sell where we were living and we didn't move to Ruthin until summer 2018. In the intervening period we (the royal 'we') did quite a lot of work removing five bathrooms and a lot of the downstairs plywood panelling. Everything we removed showed us that the building was in a worse state than we had imagined. Taking off the panelling downstairs led to a fantastic growth of orange and black mould all over the wall! We knew at its heart it had a timber framed building as there was part of one upright visible downstairs, in what had been the bar area, and ceiling beams which looked original. Upstairs, there was a very wonky wall alongside the corridor which we thought might have some timberwork behind.

It wasn't until January 2019 that we were able to start work with Ruthin builder Tony Lloyd. It was not a straightforward project for a builder. We had overall plans and listed building consent but not detailed architect's drawings and throughout we were working on the principle of replacing like for like but we had got permission for some solar panels in the valley of the roof. Otherwise, there was

little for the builder to go on, except see what came up.

Throughout, Tony and his skilled workforce have been fantastic, very patient and seemed to develop a real empathy for the building.

The roof was the first place we started and luckily the timbers were still in a good condition. There was evidence for a fire and trawling through newspapers we found that there this was in the summer of 1948. While the roof was being replaced, reusing existing slates were possible, practically all the internal plasterwork was removed. In doing this we found much more of the timber frame in the upper levels, discovered that much of the front wall had been replaced in brick and breeze blocks we think in the 1960s when the jetty over the front door was removed. It was when removing layers of Victorian plaster that fragments of a plaster frieze at the top of a wall in an upstairs room came to light. In style, it is late 16th or early 17th century and must originally have gone all around the wall. Only about 8ft (in several sections) survived and some of that was being actively damaged by water coming in from the valley in the roof.

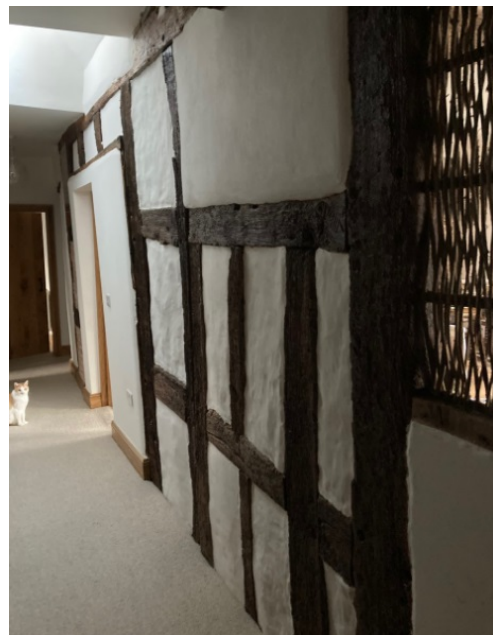
Following the advice of plasterwork specialist Ned Schaerer, we took the decorative plaster off the walls. We are in the process of taking layer upon layer of whitewash off to reveal the original decoration and will then return it to its original location. Behind this decorative plasterwork was yet older plaster which was on top of a timber framed wall.

Every window is new and double glazed but hopefully is an exact copy of the windows replaced. There were times during the building work when we could stand on the uneven downstairs floor and look right up into the roof and the pictures should give you a bit of a sense of the scale of the work.

Throughout the building works there were almost daily decisions to be made and daily exciting discoveries. We think there are the remains of three timber framed buildings, the first of which only one bay survives in Wynnstay House, is of a timber building of the same height as Wayfarer Wool next door; the second is part of a four bay taller timber frame, of which we have three of the bays; and the third is perhaps a late 17th or early 18th century building at the back of the four

bay timber frame towards Dog Lane, and at slight angle to it.

All three were linked by a Victorian L-shaped addition in the mid-1800s, of which we have found a schedule of works in the Ruthin Record Office. In almost every case, we have been able to expose the timber frame where it



survives and we have found a number of carpenters' marks as well as some burnt apotropaic marks on beams. Some wattle and daub survives and in other areas, where it was decayed, largely because water got in and turned it back to mud (!) we (again the royal 'we') replaced the wattle and daub, complete with local mud and donkey hair.

We now have a house which we hope preserves all phases of its construction, has been sympathetically renovated using traditional methods such as lime plastering and a great deal of hand joinery, and is also a comfortable, sustainable modern house to live in. We



have air source heating, solar panels and underfloor heating downstairs but hope at the same time we have maintained the character and chronology of the building. By renovating and replacing the coach lamps and sign bracket externally at the front, there is still a hint to its former commercial use.

Hopefully at a future Ruthin Open Doors weekend you will be able to come and see the end result and make up your own mind.

On the Lifeline Frontline...

Next month, Ruthin Foodbank celebrates its eight birthday. I say 'celebrate' but I am sure its organisers would rather in those years that they were able to be put out of business. The reality, however, is that during this time the call on this lifeline has only increased. For obvious reasons, 2020 has been far busier than usual and it is a credit to its volunteers and the Ruthin & district community in general that the foodbank can meet its growing obligations.

Between March 2020 and November 2020 inclusive, over 13,000lbs of food were donated in Ruthin and over 12,000lbs allocated to its clients. 380 adults and 343 children have benefited. The health emergency prevented the foodbank distributing its usual Christmas hampers.

Instead, volunteers prepared bags of Christmas-based food items and treats. In December, they prepared and distributed 106 such bags to over 400 people.

The closure of Canolfan Awelon and a £6,000 conversion grant resulted from August 2020 in the foodbank control centre moving to the basement of the town hall. This was not without its own challenges, owing to coping with distancing in a more limited space. After the re-imposition of lockdown, it resulted in deliveries to clients

rather than clients collecting their food.

If you feel you can help the Ruthin foodbank, more information is at valeofclwyd.foodbank.org.uk/give-help/

... and 160 years beforehand...

'Much to the delight of the poor', a soup kitchen was set up in Ruthin by Revd E L Banwell, Geo. Johnson, Esq and secretary Robt. Ellis, Esq.

'A large amount has already been subscribed', including £5/- (about £650 today) donated each by F R West, Esq. MP and Wilson Jones, Esq.

Each subscriber of £1 received 150 tickets 'for distribution among the poor' and each ticket allowed the purchase for 1d of a quart of soup, made up once a week. Within days, the secretary was able to announce that 'owing to the munificent subscriptions' the cost was cut to ½d.

The reporter concluded, 'We have tasted the soup and consider it exceedingly good and nourishing'.

A similar institution was set up four years before but 'from want of active co-operation was not carried out'.

North Wales Chronicle 1853

The work proposed broadly falls into five areas:

1. Installing underfloor heating in the hall and dining room. The work has been discussed and agreed with DCC's conservation officer.
2. Reinstall a staircase in the dining room using the stair inserted by the Landmark Trust in Dolbelydr near Trefnant as a template.
3. Repairs to external timber frame.
4. Remove a poor-quality lean-to building that used to be a wash-house/boot room with a more suitable structure.
5. New windows to replace inappropriate windows inserted in the early 20th century.

As work proceeds, the conservation officer will be contacted to discuss and agree any suitable amendments that may be needed as existing evidence is uncovered.



Alterations at Caerfallen



Readers may like to know of the planning proposals put forward for Caerfallen, writes Harold Jones.

Caerfallen is a fine 16th century listed Grade II* farmhouse, which many of us had the opportunity to visit in February 2017 at the invitation of the owner Zoë Henderson. It's no longer a working farm and at the time of our visit Zoë was embarking on the conversion of an outbuilding for holiday rental. It is understood that this work has now been successfully completed.

Zoë now wants to carry out repairs and alterations based on historic evidence found in the building. There is much detail shown on the application documents that were submitted in the weeks recently. Reassuringly, the architects are Phil Ebrell and Menna Gerrard Ltd.

Coronavirus Chronicles Part 4

December 4th

Pubs and cafés will from this evening need to shut by 6 p.m. Take-away food is permitted.

St Peter's Church illuminated as part of the 'Light up Denbighshire' project.

December 11th

Ysgol Brynhyfryd closes early for Christmas, under Welsh Government instruction. Teaching moves online.

December 16th

The area's primary schools close early.

The special Christmas 'bubble' set on November 24th at three households is reduced to two, over a five-day window.

December 19th

Alert Level 4 lockdown is announced for midnight, rather than 28th as planned. Pubs, cafés and non-essential shops must shut completely. Supermarkets cannot sell non-essential items. At least three Ruthin businesses stay open till midnight, chasing Christmas trade. From tomorrow, some traders offer order & collect.

The special Christmas 'bubble' now applies to Christmas Day only.

The library reverts to order & collect. The Archive closes. Lôn Parcwr waste site remains open with bookings, as does the collection of bulky items.

December 25th

St Peter's holds Christmas services. Chapels cancel theirs & remain closed.

January 3rd

Last service at St Peter's, before moving online. Volunteers ring their last peel of bells.

January 4th

Schools do not return as planned, and online learning continues.

January 9th

Public lavatories close.

January 15th

The number of confirmed covid-19 deaths in the UK passes the total population of Denbighshire.

January 18th

Bus services to Mold, Llandyrnog, Clawddnewydd and Graigfechan are all temporarily parred back. That to Chester is suspended altogether.

January 23rd

Plas Meddyg begins mass vaccination clinics.

February 4th

The County Council announces the removal of its virus-related active travel scheme in town.

February 10th

The walk-in covid-19 test centre returns to County Hall car park.

February 19th

The big 'if'. Welsh Government cautious about easing for non-essential businesses, possibly in three weeks. 'Stay at home' message continues for at least three weeks.

February 24th

Foundation years expected to return to their primary schools on phased basis.

12 Months in the Life of Ruthin & the World

This time last year, we were all coming to terms with coronavirus. Little did we know that 12 months later we would still be under its cloud

Back in March 2020, there was a new oppressive atmosphere. The town was virtually deserted. Lockdown was hard. We put plans on hold.

Things began to open up in June. There was a brief release over summer, helped by pleasant sunshine. Tourists returned in record numbers. Shops re-opened.

We are notoriously bad at predicting the future correctly. The aesthetic optimism had proven to be short lived, with autumn seeing the return of the spread of SARS-CoV-2 with a vengeance. Then, in January 2021, we learnt that the number of covid-19-related UK deaths equated to the entire population of Denbighshire. Also in January, the rate per 100,000 in Denbighshire had reached 450. Time was when PHW was concerned it was heading to 50!

New variants first likely to have been with us since September were confirmed in December. North East Wales was particularly hard hit. More and more, we all began to know of people who had the wretched virus or who had died of it. 'Long covid' emerged as a scourge and we wondered what frightened us more, an untimely death first associated with the spring of 2020 or the now understood disability dragging on and on through months of languor and lassitude.

12 Months in Words and Objects

In March 2020, we were quite earnestly informed by Reebee's that 'The experts are saying the virus is not transmittable through flowers'.

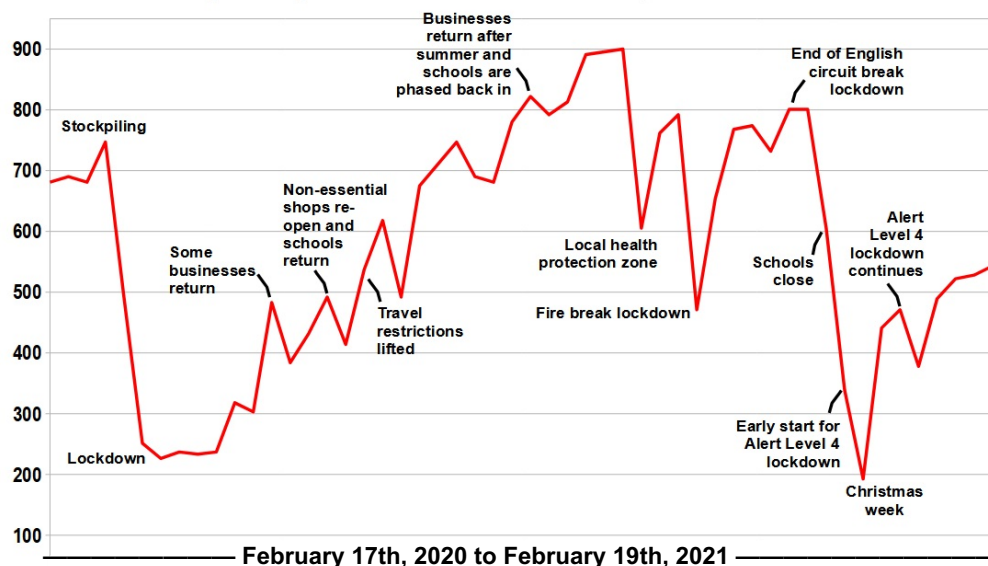
In June, we were warned to keep our cats indoors, lest our moggies handed on more than a rub around the legs. It turned out not to be a joke. The virus really was transmissible on the fur of cats.

Let's look at the other features of the year. The most tangible objects were face coverings (AKA 'masks') and hand sanitiser. Hand sanitiser ran out in Ruthin in March. Face coverings in Ruthin first surfaced that same month, too, on the far eastern faces of sixth formers of Ruthin School. Asians were more comfortable using them with their greater sense of personal responsibility; it was in their culture but, back then, they stood out as a frightening reminder of developing and enveloping world events.

Now, you're considered a nonconformist outsider without one.

in colour at www.ruthincivic.org

Average Weekly Afternoon Peak Traffic Volumes per Hour A494 Ruthin



Then there are the popular words or phrases of the times: lockdown, unprecedented, exponential, furlough, zoom, the 'R' and pandemic, not to mention social distancing, super-spreader, virulent, bubbles & the compound verb to bubble up, herd immunity, vaccine escape, vaccine hesitancy, vaccine efficacy, underlying condition, you're on mute, you're breaking up, can you hear me now?, headroom, all eight syllables of epidemiological and 'covidiot'. Fortunately, we have few of the last of these in Ruthin.

Winter Trends

During late autumn and early winter, Ruthin was struggling in terms of covid cases. When figures elsewhere in Denbighshire were going down, the prevalence in Ruthin was on the rise. This was owing to outbreaks associated with Ruthin Hospital, Ysgol Borthyn and Plas Gwyn care home and the way in which some of this had spread into the community.

At the end of this year, BCUHB cases were increasing again, against the trend of a drop in all other Welsh health boards.

Denbighshire was nevertheless something of a covid borderland, betwixt the higher infection rates of Flintshire & Wrexham and the lower numbers in Conwy, Gwynedd and Anglesey. We aren't at the English boundary and we don't have the densities of Flintshire & Wrexham, yet we aren't quite so 'remote' as Gwynedd and Anglesey. Going into

spring and we are now seeing more stability.

Travel

And, what about our habits? We travel less. Take a look at the traffic on the A494 in Ruthin, above, and it mirrors the state of Wales at each specific period, albeit with lockdown fatigue seeing a modest increase during each, as time went on. My own car, for example, managed 1,189 miles in 2020.

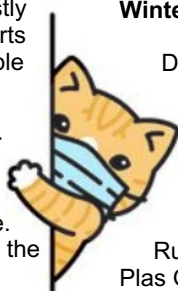
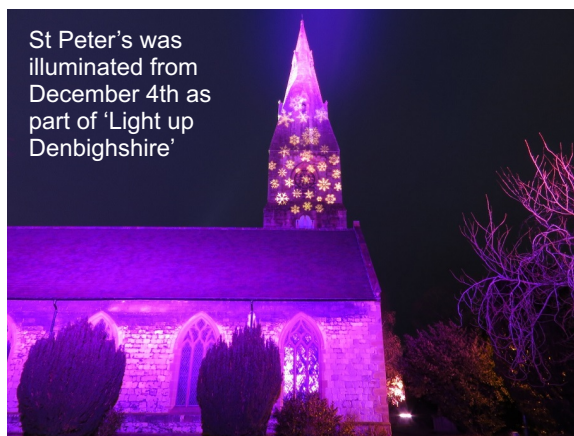
Working from Home

In December 2020, we reported that WFH was having a positive impact on local house sales. In 2020, video conferencing suddenly became *de rigour* inside and outside work.

Effect on the Town Centre

Seasonal decorations lingered well into the new year in some of the shops forced to shut before Christmas. No one ventured back to remove them.

We don't yet know the long term impact on the town. We are disproportionately reliant on the number of hospitality & comparison traders, all of whom had to shut at each lockdown. We would expect some negative long term change but this is unlikely to be on the seismic scale we see in larger towns. Increased internet shopping has become entrenched and engrained. There was nevertheless a call to shop locally during Christmas, somewhat interrupted by the necessity of a further pre- and post-Christmas lockdown.



March 2021

townandaround.org.uk 9

Why Paint North Wales?

Asks Ruthinite Harry Robertson

When I was 14 years old, I spent a magical day sitting painting the view on a sunny hillside just outside Colwyn Bay. It was the first holiday I had ever had. I was staying with an 'auntie', (i.e. a sister to my foster parent with whom I lived).

I'm sure the paintings themselves were not terribly good, but the experience was so memorable that it decided my future. Thereafter I wanted to paint the landscapes of North Wales.

So, after running a London college creative arts department, I moved to North Wales with my wife Mari (also a painter, brought up in Rhewl).

Fashion or Truth?

Now, I realise that all art is subject to fashion. Some of the grand art panjandruns (to use the term favoured by the late art critic Brian Sewell, or the 'gatekeepers' of taste as they sometimes call themselves, would strongly deny this, of course, and declare that art is way above the vicissitudes of vogue—and though I would love to agree, I'm afraid that it just ain't so.

I also realise that the fashions of the day elevate some sectors and activities of the art world, while others are rigorously despised.

During the 'Modern Art' period, the characteristic of shock has been the main driver for artists who have had to spend their careers on the 'outrage-treadmill', always going one step further than previous artists. The most despised area of art, the lowest of the low, has been that of landscape painting. I knew this when I took up painting them. Initially, however, I didn't think too much about it. I started painting landscapes simply because I enjoyed it, because it gave me the most pleasure and satisfaction of any type of painting that I had tried. Honesty pushed me in this direction and in the main I am totally confident about the choice.

Occasionally, however, in my most insecure moments, I sometimes ask myself, why paint something so

irredeemably 'uncool' to art establishment sensibilities.

Well, here's the reason: 'Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.'

King James Bible (Cambridge Ed.)

Of course, it may seem strange that a non-believer like myself should be quoting the Bible to justify a strongly-felt conviction. But these elegant and clear words express my personal view better than any of my own ever could.

So, although simply looking at the world around us, observing its great beauty, and re-producing it as best one can onto canvas is considered to be uncool. Nevertheless, I choose to persist.

Everywhere a Painting

I've spent many intense days at and around Rhug. It is a place, like so many others in North Wales, where, one is a little overwhelmed by the visual possibilities. Every direction you look, there is a potentially decent painting waiting for you. Scary!

I suppose I've drawn and painted this area dozens of times. It's impossible to exhaust as a subject, because of how variable it can look, given slightly differing angles, times of day, light, and



so on.

The main tree in this particular Rhug picture, above, took quite a bit of painting, and is fairly successful, I think. (However, for a really exquisite depiction of a tree take a look at The Poringland Oak, by John (Old) Crome in Tate Britain).

This profusion of subject choice includes the gentle scenery of places like Lady Bagot's Drive (left), to the wilder, sweeping views of Snowdonia. Mind you, for all that we owe a debt to the Romantics for changing our view of the wilder parts of nature, I do feel that somewhere like Betws y Coed, in particular, has suffered with too many paintings which have over-sentimentalised it. I personally find the outlook of the Romantics (both the painters and the poets) to be a little too grandiose for my taste: too much overt emoting. I prefer the stance of the 19th century Liverpool school of realist painters, who approached painting in a



harryrobertsonpainter.com

more understated way. I think it's always best to paint what you see, and let the emotion look after itself. Restraint rather than emotional carte blanche.

I still find it surprising to recall that mountainous areas such as Snowdonia were considered to be frightening places best avoided, before the romantic poets and painters enabled the public to see such areas in a pleasurable way.

Of course, the mountains have always been as they are. The thing that changed was human perception. They became magnificent and beautiful rather than threatening.

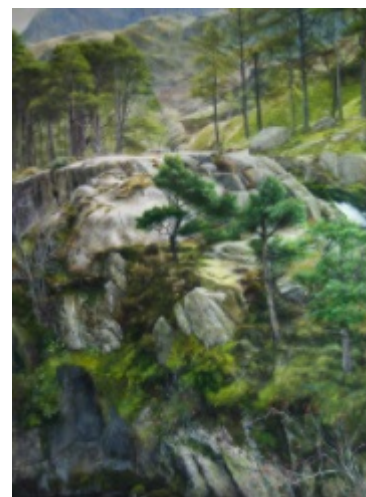
The light at Ogwen is great, particularly, as any landscape painter or photographer knows, when it's a cross light, as at the early or late part of the day. Such a light really reveals the form and structure of the landscape features. I hope that anyone visiting the Ogwen Valley could instantly spot the individual outcrop depicted here (top of page). I think it's important to treat any and all features as particularly as possible.

A painted rock will therefore be treated like a portrait of a specific rock, rather than a generic 'rock-y-ish' form.

This painting of Ogwen (below) was also made primarily as a study of rocks.

The organiser of the North Wales Open Contest (into which I had entered it) told me afterwards that it was the first winning painting in the history of the contest about which he had had no complaints from the public! (I'm pretty sure this comment was intended as a compliment.....?)

Mari isn't keen on it. She thinks it a bit 'chinese-y'. I can see what she means—those rather cold and flat giant watercolours of mountain-scapes. I





prefer to think of it, in those moments when I need to cheer myself up, as somewhat akin to those simple and austere landscapes found in the background of Piera della Francesca. But (before you think I've lost it completely) I'm obviously thinking of the subject and its character, not the quality of painting.

Although Ogwen is a stunning site for picture making, the weather can range from hot, to nigh on arctic. Anyone choosing to work here has to be fully prepared, not only with the painting materials etc, but particularly with suitable clothes.

A while ago, I went to the falls to paint and was standing on icy rocks, actually in the middle of the frozen river. In spite of wearing suitable footwear and multiple socks, my feet were freezing. I had to pack it in. I know that some would say it's possible to work from inside a car to stay warm and this is true. But you can't take the car up the mountainside and park it in a frozen riverbed.

Although primarily a landscape painter, I occasionally do a portrait. In my view, there is little difference between the two in terms of *modus operandi*.

One standard view about portraiture is that it's essential to get to know the subject well before doing the painting.

Other painters, such as Otto Dix, think that this can actually interfere with the painter's judgement, and that it's better to know nothing. Simply concentrate on the exterior, which, if precisely seen, tells everything necessary about the sitter. I lean towards Otto.

A few years ago, I did a portrait of my fellow Ruthinite, the Welsh tenor, Rhys Meirion. Although he is internationally known, and a formidable musical artist, he is also a really open and approachable person, with his feet firmly planted on the ground. So I had to take care that this knowledge about his character didn't make my portrait too flattering!

Finally, and thankfully, although we have all had a somewhat desperate year, we can be sure that when normality returns the mountains and the valleys will still be there for us to paint.

Books Do Furnish a Town

by Derek Jones

(With apologies to Anthony Powell, 1905-2000, who wrote 'Books do Furnish a Room', one of twelve novels with the collective title 'A Dance to the Music of Time')

I wonder how many readers of *Town and Around* have noticed how, while the pandemic is still raging, men and women being interviewed at home for the TV News have chosen to place themselves in front of their bookshelves at home. Very good, I say, and it applies to men and women of all political persuasions. Have you also noticed that, according to reports in the national press, the sales of books have also shot up, quite considerably? Once again, I say, excellent news: contrary to a common assumption, the age of the printed word is not yet dead.

There is, of course, a down side to this. Except for a short break from lockdown, the books have been sold online. That's certainly better than nothing, but I suggest that it's better to be able to browse in a good bookshop, to come across a work which you hadn't seen reviewed, and have realised that this is your kind of book. Even more expansively, you might pick up one or two classics of world literature, and decide it was about time you read them. Even better is when you have a chat with the book seller and find that he or she is equally enthusiastic. Some of the bigger bookshops take their enthusiasm even further, by inviting readers to meet living authors, who introduce and discuss their work over a glass of wine.

You might say that this kind of gathering is altogether too ambitious for a small town like Ruthin (population about 5,500). To which it is only possible to name Hay on Wye (population 1,500), which has no less than 15 bookshops, and, even more extraordinary, Wigtown, Dumfriesshire (population 967), which has 16! Of both Hay and Wigtown you can say, without a shadow of a doubt, books do furnish a town. You might even say that they were overdoing it!

Back in Ruthin, since Janet Kenyon Thompson's Spread Eagle Books closed down almost two years ago, we have just one (Welsh language) bookshop in the centre of town, a small specialist shop at the Craft Centre, and a desultory couple of shelves at Tesco. There is surely scope—and room in one or more of the empty shops—for the town to have at least one or two more general bookshops for browsers. I hate to make invidious comparisons, but the Mold bookshop seems to flourish, even taking advantage recently of a free advert offered by The Times Literary Supplement to independent booksellers; and, just like Janet did, order books, (in Mold's case, with free delivery to readers' homes). Mold, of course, is much bigger (population around 12,000, with a considerable urban hinterland), but its success, as well as that of Hay



and Wigtown, ought to encourage Ruthin to take a leaf out of their book (an appropriate turn of phrase, which came to mind just as I was writing it!).

I expect all sorts of responses from the unalloyed joy of booklovers to the really downbeat 'it couldn't work here'. I can only say that Ruthin seems like a place where an imaginative bookshop owner might do rather well. First of all, of course, find the bookseller! Failing that, how about taking a leaf (that word again!) out of the community shops at Pwllglas, Llandegla and Llanarmon yn Iâl: a community bookshop, owned and operated by a range of community organisations including, of course, the Ruthin and District Civic Association, the History Society, the local University of the Third Age, and all manner of special interest groups from archaeology to bird watching, from gardening to long distance walking, and international travel, but at its heart, those in love with words, including poetry, and the many enthusiasts who enjoy well-written, well-plotted novels.

I venture to say that Ruthin and district needs them. Please send your responses to the compiler of *Town and Around* (details, p12), another branch of the fellowship of the written word. 'Travelling Hopefully' would not be a bad title for such a new venture.

Going 'local'

The stock of mainly Welsh language books is deceptively large at our own Elfair, Clwyd Street. They have a remarkable community of customers. They will happily order anything you need. At the time of writing, they are currently open for phone & collect.

Mold Bookshop is the nearest we have for new general fiction and non-fiction. Again, they will order for you.

Online purchases using hive.co.uk (rather than Amazon) and you can specify a minimum 10 per cent towards your nominated independent bookshop (we suggest Mold's. Spread Eagle Books was never part of this offer).

Outlets providing secondhand books in Ruthin include the Co-op, the Coffee Cabin, Homewood Bound (Rhewl) and, of course, our two charity shops.

Peter Daniels has his notebook out

In June 2020's Town and Around, we wondered whether the virus resulted in 20-plate car registrations being collectors' items, so few were there during the first months of the pandemic.

BL08 LDV

Were we right? Data are now available. Here are some car-related facts about Ruthin, as at December 31st, 2020.

- The number of new cars registered in Ruthin during the March to August 2020 20-plate period was 60 per cent fewer than in previous year March to August 2019.
- The current 70-plate finished at the end of February but it's too soon to have an accurate feel. Last year, though, there were almost as many 69-plate registrations (September 2019 to February 2020) in Ruthin as there were 68-plates (September 2018 to February 2019). The number of 69-plate vehicles was only 10 per cent lower than the previous period.
- The median (average) age of cars in Ruthin at December 31st was eight years old. The mode (single most popular year) was 2015.

Ruthin 1 is comparable to Llanfwrog Urban (Cae Seren, Porth y Dre, Maes Hafod and Llawr y Dyffryn, etc).

Ruthin 2 broadly covers Bryn Eryl, Greenfield Road, Haulfryn, Central, Lôn Parcwr, Canol y Dre, Glasdir and Bryn Goodman.

Ruthin 3 broadly equates to Parc Brynhyfryd, Erw Goch, Bro Deg, Maes Cantaba, Castle Park & Llanrhydd.

■ The average age of cars in Ruthin 1 (see box below) was slightly older than in Ruthin 2. Ruthin 2 was slightly older than in Ruthin 3.

■ About 37 per cent of cars are registered in Ruthin 3. Ruthin 1 sees 30 per cent of cars registered.

■ About 12-13 per cent of cars have private plates, either in the current (e.g. CX17 FLY) or previous sequences (e.g. 175 FLY; FLY 175T; D15 FLY). That's two to three per cent above the UK average. Almost half of all cars with private plates are in Ruthin 3.

■ Some 97 per cent of vehicles have a registration in the current system (e.g. CX17 FLY). Fewer than one per cent of cars have an Irish number plate.

■ 20 per cent of cars were first registered in Wales. Of these, over eight out of 10 were first registered in North Wales.

■ About 22 per cent were first registered in the Deeside code area (Chester & Shrewsbury e.g. DF17 FLY). Next is Manchester & Merseyside (approx. eight per cent), Yorkshire (seven per cent) and Preston (five per cent). London-registered cars account for three per cent.

■ Very interestingly, till recently, two separate vehicles in Ruthin had an identical registration number. Both were parked off-road. Not surprisingly, the DVLA referred only to one of these but the DVLA had it the wrong way round!

■ Among the sea of private plates in & around Ruthin are some quite inventive examples, the most interesting of which include GA06 ROD & GA09 ROD (neither of which belong to a Rod, Rodney, Rhodri or Roderick); DRA 990N, AU10 MAK (and partner LF08 ETH, whose name isn't Ethel); MER 117N; LW51 TOM, S10 NED; L111 ETY; R11 EWL; RO51 CYM; and CY08 MRO.

■ Then there are the registration plates that you could almost make into

yellow paint with which to decorate it. Apparently, birds of the same colour as the feeder are more likely to be attracted.



Food for Thought

by Kathy Daniels

This February, while perusing Facebook, I happened upon a post which caught my interest: an online meeting entitled 'Food for Life' organised by Denbigh-based Resource CIC, a social enterprise committed to improving local communities and the environment, through sustainable activities.

I duly registered and, to my surprise, received a mysteriously plain activity box with no clue as to its contents. On opening it, I found a ceramic bird feeder and accompanying blue and

Fleet Registrations

All of Bryn Rhydd-based Roberto's Taxis have personalised plates including RE03 RTO, R30 RTO, RR03 RTO, RBO8 RTO, RR03 RTO and R800 RTO. Davey's has DV14 CAB.

The familiar Royal Mail red delivery vans tend to be registered with 'W' prefixes either from where their Fiats were imported; or with the prefix 'K' for the currently favoured Peugeot's, via a single dealer in Corby.

Used on the X51 through Ruthin, Arriva's fleet till recently carried J100-900 ABW for Arriva Buses Wales. Otherwise, Arriva buses in the North West of England, like in Wales, have tended to carry CX or CY plates.

Registration plates seen in recent times in Ruthin linked to the surname 'Kell' include LL10 KEL, R4 KEL, E6 KLL, KE11 EMK, KE11 MUM, KE11 STE, KE11 FUN, AL11 KEL & KE11 NAT.

something they are not. A Volvo formerly in Parc Brynhyfryd till about five years ago had a registration plate BL08 LDV. By coincidence, it was in 2008 that production at the LDV factory in Birmingham ceased. LDV had previously been part of the BL (British Leyland) Group.

C38 TWP

■ I always like YR56 TWP, which is usually parked on Lôn Parcwr. In the 1990s, blue Ford C38 TWP was on Erw Goch. Neither are or were private plates.

BK66 ZXG

The random letters to the right of the current system tend to contain one or more of the least popular letters which, in reverse order, are: Z, J, X, K, V, B, Y, W, and G (Q isn't used in the right hand cluster). Examples in Ruthin are CW04 NJZ, LG13 ZWA, BF62 JCX, DV12 XJW, YP56 XPJ, BJ09 XJV, CX70 XZA and BK66 ZXG

Also within were a small bag of compost; courgette, Swiss chard & basil lime seeds; and a seed bomb mix, with instructions.

The online meeting was to cover topics such as, Why we should compost at home; Waste-free shopping & the community; Incredible Edible Ruthin; and the Cae Dai Trust community orchard & garden.

Come the appointed hour, I wasn't able to join because of 'modern technology incompatibility' (make of that what you will) but those interested in more details might like to visit resourceswales.com.

If your tech will permit it.

'Gŵyl neu dim Gŵyl?' Dyna ydi y Cwestiwn

gan Jim Bryan, Is-gadeirydd,
Cymdeithas Gŵyl Rhuthun

Fel gymaint o ddigwyddiadau eraill ar draws y DU a'r byd, roedd 2020 yn flwyddyn o ganslo a gohirio digwyddiadau o ganlyniad i bandemig Covid-19.

Gwnaeth rhai trefnwyr arallgyfeirio i gynnal digwyddiadau ar-lein, dim drwy ddewis ond drwy hanfod. Cafodd digwyddiadau eraill eu canslo yn gyfan gwbl, eto nid drwy ddewis ond drwy hanfod—fe oedd yr ŵyl yma yn Rhuthun, yn un o'r rhain.

Tra yr oedd yn benderfyniad anodd iawn ar gyfer pwyllgor yr ŵyl yn Ebrill 2020, wedi ei seilio yn unig ar y gobaith y byddai y sefyllfa yn gwella erbyn yr haf, drwy edrych yn ol rwan, fe roedd yn bendant y penderfyniad cywir, gan yn anfodus – ni wnaeth yr amgylchiadau wella.

Y flaenoriaeth adeg hynny fel rwan oedd cydymffurfio gyda rheolau ac ymbellhau cymdeithasol i achub bywydau, ond cyfnod anodd iawn i'n holl gymuned a busnesau lleol. Fe wnaeth Pwyllgor yr ŵyl gydweithio gyda Ymlaen Rhuthun a grwpiau cymunedol eraill i gynnal Cyngerdd Nadolig Rhithiol ar Noswyl Nadolig, a gafodd ei wyllo dros 3000 o

weithiau.
Rwan be am 2021? Be am ddigwyddiadau?

Mae Eisteddfod yr Urdd yn Ninbych wedi ei gohirio tan Mai 2022. Mae Eisteddfod Ryngwladol Llangollen wedi cyhoeddi eu bod yn cynnal digwyddiad hybrid eleni gyda chymysgedd o ddigwyddiadau byw ac ar-lein. Mae'r Sioe Fawr a'r Eisteddfod Genedlaethol yn Nhregaron bellach hefyd wedi cael eu gohirio tan 2022.

I ddigwyddiadau llai fel yr ŵyl yma yn Rhuthun, mae'r dewis i Bwyllgor yr ŵyl yn un peth mewn llawer o ffyrdd, ond mae maint, trefniadau a chostau yn ffactorau mewn unrhyw benderfyniad am gynnal y digwyddiad. Os yw rheolau ymbellhau cymdeithasol dal mewn grym yn yr haf, bydd y mwyafrif o ddigwyddiadau, gan gynnwys digwyddiad Top Dre yr ŵyl, methu digwydd. Tra yn haf 2020, fe wnaeth rhai digwyddiadau gael eu gynnal drwy wahanu grwpiau o bobl o'i gilydd, wedi eu lledeanu dros ardal eang, ond dydi sgwar y dref yma yn Rhuthun ddim yn addas i'r fath beth.

Mae yna ffactorau eraill hefyd i'w cysidro gan gynnwys gael y gwahanol ganiatadau gan y cyngor sir ac awdurdodau eraill i gynnal digwyddiad



mewn lle cyhoeddus, ond hefyd materion fel sicrhau yswiriant ar gyfer y digwyddiad, a cael cymorth y criw arbennig o wirfoddolwyr ffyddlon fel yn y gorfennol, sydd yn hanfodol i gynnal y digwyddiad Top Dre bob blwyddyn.

Dwi yn gwybod fod pennawd yr erthygl yma yn awgrymu mai'r dewis yw unai cynnal Gŵyl fel yr arfer neu peidio cael un o gwbl – os na fydd Top Dre yn bosib, mae pwyllgor yr ŵyl yn edrych ar cyfres o ddigwyddiadau rhithiol yn ail hanner 2021, ond gyda hyn yn ddiabynnol ar yr amgylchiadau ar y pryd.

Mae un peth yn bendant – bydd yr ŵyl nol ar y sgwar ryw ben, a mi wnawn wneud yn siwr ei fod yn ddigwyddiad i'w gofio!

Zooming Around by Bike

By Heather Williams

Quite a few of us have got used to the expression 'Zoom meetings' as a way of keeping in touch with family, friends and other people. However, the word 'zoom' traditionally means to move or travel quickly.

During the first lockdown, during my regular walks, I was rather envious of other people I saw on their bikes. Unfortunately, my bike was out of use, as both tyres had punctures following a ride in November 2019 when it had been savaged by thorn cuttings from hedges. The local bike shop was closed and I was unable to get it repaired.

However, I became aware of a new social enterprise which had been started during the lockdown by Robin and Beth, who live in Graigfechan. On a holiday cycling from Wales to Istanbul (and back again), they thought of an idea to encourage people to use their bikes more. They called the company, Drosi: a Welsh word which means to convert, to turn something into another use or purpose. Basically, they can convert your own bike into an electric bike.

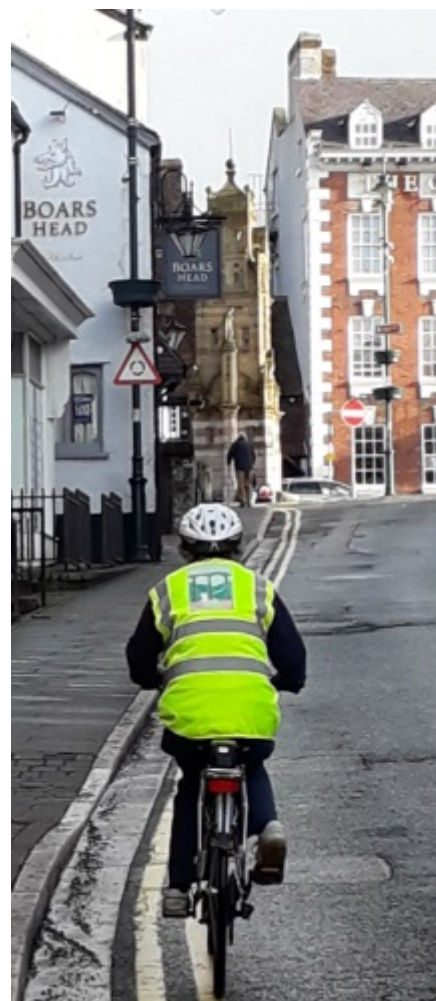
Alternatively, they have refurbished bikes for sale, which they have transformed into e-bikes. The company is particularly keen on its green credentials: reducing waste and providing solutions to climate

change. It has also been selected to be part of Lloyd's Bank Social Entrepreneurs' Start Up Programme, jointly funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

As another birthday approached in September, I mulled the idea over. I liked the idea of a conversion of my bike, rather than cluttering up the garage with another one. I also thought it might encourage me to go a bit farther by bike, particularly on the quiet lanes up the hills. I contacted them and soon afterwards Robin and Beth came round to look at my Raleigh to assess how it could be converted and check what repairs needed to be done. I asked for them to order new puncture resistant tyres as well as new brakes. Fortunately, I didn't have to wait too long for the repairs and the conversion, as they already had an order in for a number of conversion kits for e-bikes.

Soon I was testing my 'new' bike out. I always had to get off my bike on the top part of Clwyd Street and now I zoomed up it! Further afield, it was quite amazing and exhilarating to cycle up and over the Clwydian Range to the village of Nannerch. Ironically, it helped me to feel that I was not quite 'over the hill' yet in terms of my age!

Details and prices are available at www.drosibikes.org



Heather making light work of the Clwyd Street climb

Sparkling Jewels on St Peter's Square

The recent opening of Clogau Gold jewellers reminds Heather Williams of her quest to discover the whereabouts of another, older jewellers in town

A couple of years ago, we needed some old watches repairing. You will probably remember the sort: the ones that didn't need batteries! There was nowhere in Ruthin that did this type of work, so we went to the shop in Chester, from where one watch had been bought. This was Rigby Jewellers in Frodsham Street. We had excellent service from the current owner, Jason Rigby, and the timepieces were restored to working order again.

We discovered that he was the fourth generation of the family which had owned the jewellery business. His family had originally established the business in Ruthin, in 1889. Maybe this was a shop that King Edward VII visited. He is said to have visited nearby Rouw Chemist's shop with Patsy Cornwallis West, after which Rouw proudly displayed 'By appointment to King Edward VII'.

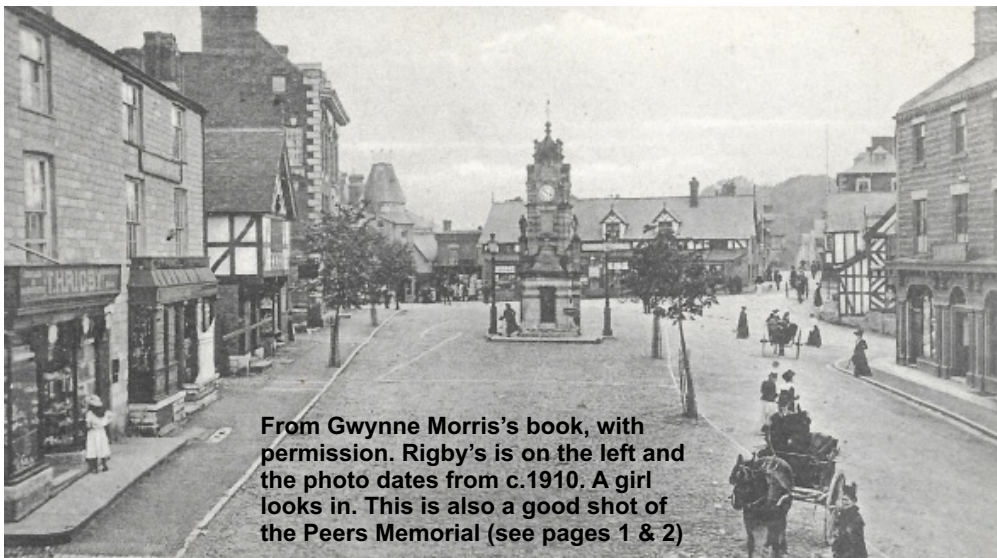
After enquiring from locals in Ruthin about the location of this shop, I was informed it was situated on St Peter's Square, where 'State of Distress' now is.

I was told that in a book of old picture postcards of Ruthin and District published in 1991 by one of our RADCA members, D Gwynne Morris, there was a postcard which showed the shop.

A girl is looking in the window of the shop and the caption underneath the postcard informs the reader that the shop was run as a jeweller and musical instrument dealer by Mr T H Rigby, as can be seen on the fascia board in the postcard. His son, E S Rigby (the second generation) moved the shop from Ruthin to Chester shortly after the First World War, so around 100 years ago.

It is good to see that the fronts on the

original shop in Ruthin still survive. They probably date back to the mid-late 19th Century. The shop fronts, together with the late 18th Century character of the main part of the building, contribute to the group value of these listed buildings in this part of St Peter's Square.



From Gwynne Morris's book, with permission. Rigby's is on the left and the photo dates from c.1910. A girl looks in. This is also a good shot of the Peers Memorial (see pages 1 & 2)

All in a Stew over Chickens in the Pan-demic

Isabel Stewart writes of her beloved backyard chickens, which are enduring lockdown, too

Just when you thought that things couldn't get much worse—they just did.

Towards the end of 2020, avian flu returned, causing many hens, ducks, geese, guinea fowl & pheasants to be infected by migrating birds carrying the virus once again into the UK. This resulted in loss of earnings, heartaches for owners and many problems.

The extremely contagious virus can infect any type bird. It can actually affect humans, too, though it rarely does. The bird symptoms are loss of appetite, reduction of egg laying, a swollen, blueish comb & wattle, cough, sneezing and diarrhoea, alarmingly followed by sudden death.

Sometimes asymptomatic creatures just drop dead.

It was announced by DEFRA on December 14th, 2020 that *all* hens,

ducks, geese etc. had to be housed—even our few beloved pets. They had to be completely protected from wild birds. For instance, food & water had to be kept inside their quarters and that is still the situation at the time of writing in February.

Since November, in fact, there have been outbreaks of the virus in Yorkshire, Norfolk, Devon, Scotland, Anglesey and equally near to us at Frodsham. The latest outbreak was in Redcar on February 6th, 2021.

Hundreds of these birds had to be culled and this included a few cases of backyard chickens. This situation hopefully will change in spring when the infected migratory birds fly back home and we can let our beloved pets out again.

If anyone comes across a few dead birds (not single ones) then they should contact DEFRA on 03459 335577 or

their local vet, but these potentially contaminated birds must under no circumstances be handled.



Seen in Passing...

Beresford Adams's tactics in the sale of housing might not be to everyone's liking. If your property was sticking, they were often quite bullish in trying to persuade you to join them. It was nevertheless a shame to see the office close and become empty. This photo shows an employee locking up the place for the very last time, with the company name now removed.



As we rightly concentrate on repair to and refurbishment of our Peers Memorial, there are other parts of town requiring some TLC. In recent times, we've mentioned the finger posts and the Craft Centre crane and the 1920s street names. New to the list must be the state of the windows in the Corporation, Castle Street. We can take for granted historic sites such as this and we hope with more income its proprietors are able to deal with those windows in poor condition sympathetically.

Shops and businesses in town made a valiant effort in the face of uncertainty to brighten up our Christmas by producing a much better than average set of Christmas windows. For some of our shops, Christmas lingered a little longer than usual, with decorations lasting till the third week of January—or, in some cases, even into February. Why? With lockdown having begun on December 19th and continuing throughout February, there was little reason for staff to return to their shops to change their windows.

In late December, the Royal Mail took delivery of a new delivery van. Nothing exceptional there but it now displays a sort-of advert for its express parcel drop service. Except that the nearest post boxes able to accept pre-paid parcels at any hour are currently in St Asaph or Wrexham. Perhaps we might see a suitable box in our locality soon. Meanwhile, the post office itself remains open.



And talking of vehicles, also in December, Ruthin School acquired six

brand new minibuses, representing an investment of some £170,000 plus VAT. They replace vehicles of between eight and 17 years.



Several stray swans arrived at Cae Ddol in January to disrupt the usual peace there. Understandably, the incumbents got very defensive and there followed several days of agro before things returned to normal, with just two remaining.

As one door closes, another opens? In late January, we learnt of a planning application to convert the ground floor at 1 Priory Street to a restaurant. This not long after the closure of the famed On the Hill.

Revd Fr Dylan Parry Jones will probably have left the Dyffryn Clwyd mission area by the time you read this. Throughout his curacy, he has spent many hours in the town centre, latterly with his dog, engaging and discussing and listening. He moves to take up a post on the fringe of Wrexham. Coffee shops in Ruthin will miss his trade!

We know that pubs are struggling but there is no reason to assume our pubs cannot recover. The exception appears to be The Star, closed since the beginning of the first lockdown. Rumour has it that it's to be transformed into flats.

The start of the Clwyd Alyn housing project at Glasdir with the installation of fencing on January 29th even caught out some people on the adjacent Taylor Wimpey site.



Damage caused by Storm Christoph undermined parts of the bank of the River Clwyd and some of the gabions.

In January & February, has been taking place cutting back trees/vegetation in Mold Road, to help with stability of embankment wall. It was near the site of the former bridge.

10 Years Ago

Amid bleak news of five town centre shop closures in January 2011 (to add to one that closed in December) came more positive tidings that Wetherspoon's was to purchase the Castle Hotel from the late Stephanie Booth's Llangollen Hotels.



The Civic Association had long campaigned for major investment in the building. For example, when in September 2010 we reported on the 'inexcusable neglect' of the building, the edition of Town & Around caught the eye of Booth's solicitors, who promptly threatened legal action against the Civic Association.

It appeared we had touched a nerve.

Booth closed the Castle Hotel in January but later reopened it, struggling until the Wetherspoon's deal was eventually struck, in March 2011. That deal was reported to be a fragile one and apparently it nearly fell through.



Following a timetable announced by Wetherspoon's in April 2011, refurbishment began in August, when it became clear just how neglected the building had become. Aside from the slight problem in September of the destruction of a conservation-grade ceiling, the story had a happy ending. The Castle Hotel reopened resplendent in January 2012, welcomed locally by all, its refurbishment attracting the Quayle Award 2012.

Ruthin & District Civic Association

Big Ruthin (& District) Quiz



How's your knowledge of Ruthin & district?

Join us on the Big Ruthin Quiz on **April 8th at 7pm**. Your

Committee is very conscious that the Civic Association has been unable to meet for events and the Committee felt that a light-hearted and good-natured get together might be appropriate. This will of course be via Zoom and there will not be the usual Zoom time constraints.

We have assembled a number of questions on Ruthin but, importantly, also the district, to test your knowledge of the area. Watch for an email for details of how to join,

Can you help?

Can you help by writing something for Town & Around?

Do you have a burning topic you feel needs airing? Something that social media mightn't to justice to?

We are always looking for articles about Ruthin that fit loosely (or sometimes not!) with the Civic Association's remit: to promote civic pride, promote high standards of planning and architecture and secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of features of historical and public interest.

Our contact details and the deadlines are on the right. Please do get in touch.

coming soon. Do check your spam, in case!

This event will be open to members, friends and supporters alike & is suitable for individuals, couples or small teams.

Quayle Award 2019

The usual practice in the conferment of the annual Quayle Award is first to receive suggestions and nominations. There follows visits by the Civic Association's Quayle Sub-committee, a recommendation and, finally, an award.

Visits in 2020 to look at suitable projects completed in 2019 were impossible. As 2019 is now rather 'cold', the Committee having considered candidates, unanimously felt that the 2019 award should go to Yr Hen Lys.

Quayle Award 2020

We now need to consider 2020's offerings. Nominated so far are the Clwyd Alyn housing scheme at Llanbedr; The Griffin, Llanbedr; the Old School (Memorial Buildings); Wynnstay House; and Ysgol Llanfair. Members with suggestions or comments please need to contact the Secretary by the end of March 2021 (details, right).

AGM 2020

At the October 2020 AGM, the Committee for the ensuing year was agreed as follows: Anne Roberts MBE (Chair); Heather Williams (Vice-chair); Robert Williams (Treasurer); and Kay Culhane, Kathy Daniels, Harold Jones, Menna Jones, Liz Williams and Peter Daniels (Secretary). Co-opted member was Steve Beach.

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

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

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

The deadline for the next edition is May 15th, 2021

Thanks are due to this quarter's contributors:

Jim Bryan, Kathy Daniels, Peter Daniels, Bobby Feeley, Fiona Gale, Brian Hubble, Derek Jones, Harold Jones, Harry Robertson, Isabel Stewart, Heather Williams; and with the help of Kate Harcus, Mike Jones, Dorinda Kostravenglis, Gwynne Morris, Robert Owen-Ellis, Rob Price, Anne Roberts, Leo Sassler and Robert Williams.

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)