

Quarterly comment & features from the Ruthin & District Civic Association

It's Gonna be Brutal

The Civic Association has long-advocated slower traffic speeds in town. The Welsh Government's 2021/22 legislative programme could make this a reality—and well beyond the town centre itself

Counts undertaken by the Civic Association's Traffic Survey Unit indicate that as much as 57 per cent of traffic in the town centre is using it as a rat run, rather than arriving in the town centre to visit, shop, load or unload. That's a significant proportion of traffic in town that need not be there. The percentage is higher in the early morning and early evening, thanks to commuters—and generally faster then, too.

Add to this the fact that the town centre itself is punctuated by dwellings alongside shops. That's part of what makes Ruthin the town it is. It's fortunate that we have people prepared to live within the town centre, adding to its vibrancy and care. It is they who have to suffer from intrusive traffic, including too high road speeds. In the 2005

pre-planning report submitted by Tesco, its consultants stated that a quarter of buildings in the town centre were dwellings, i.e. residences not businesses. A high proportion of the streetscape is therefore residential, not commercial.

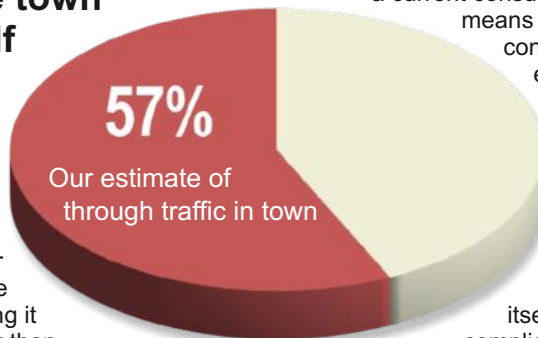
Announced in July 2021, the Welsh Government wishes to introduce a blanket 20 mph maximum in all residential areas of Wales. This, of course, will be subject to a current consultation and is by no means a foregone conclusion. But if enacted, 30 mph would no longer be the urban default.

This will be the case in our villages, too.

In Ruthin town centre itself, assuming compliance (which is also not a given) it could help to rebalance travel a little more in favour of pedestrians and cyclists.

Over its dozen or so years, the Town Council's Market Town of the Future project has refocused itself, depending upon changing public views, changing priorities and shifts in public policy. We're pleased to note, however, that the one consistent theme at the very front of the agenda has been an enhancement of (and

Continued on page 2



In Praise of the Craft Centre

Derek Jones celebrates a local gallery with a national & international reputation



'Mastery: Women in Silver'

Can you guess from which online publication the following quotation is taken and which building in Ruthin is being applauded? You may well have gathered that the writer is talking about the Ruthin Craft Centre, but you may well be surprised that it is from the columns of Trip Adviser! Here it is:

'What an exciting and unashamedly sophisticated venue! Congratulations all round to those responsible for this beautiful building containing shows of such aspiration and excellence. We spent an hour and a half soaking up works and envying the local aficionados their luck. Why doesn't every region and district have somewhere that aims to be this supportive and influential?'

That applause comes from the tourism industry. It is supported by the Craft professionals and critics:

'Over the past 25 years, Philip Hughes with his deputy director Jane Gerrard have done an extraordinary thing, creating the nation's most vibrant and cutting-edge contemporary craft gallery in North Wales.'

This second quotation is extracted from the May/June edition of Crafts

Continued on page 2



The Craft Centre's
this September on

John Merrill's sculpture 'Tipping Point' (below) will feature
Sky Arts' series 'Landmark' on Freeview & Freesat



Craft Centre, from p1

magazine, which listed the Ruthin team as among 'the most influential people in British Craft'.

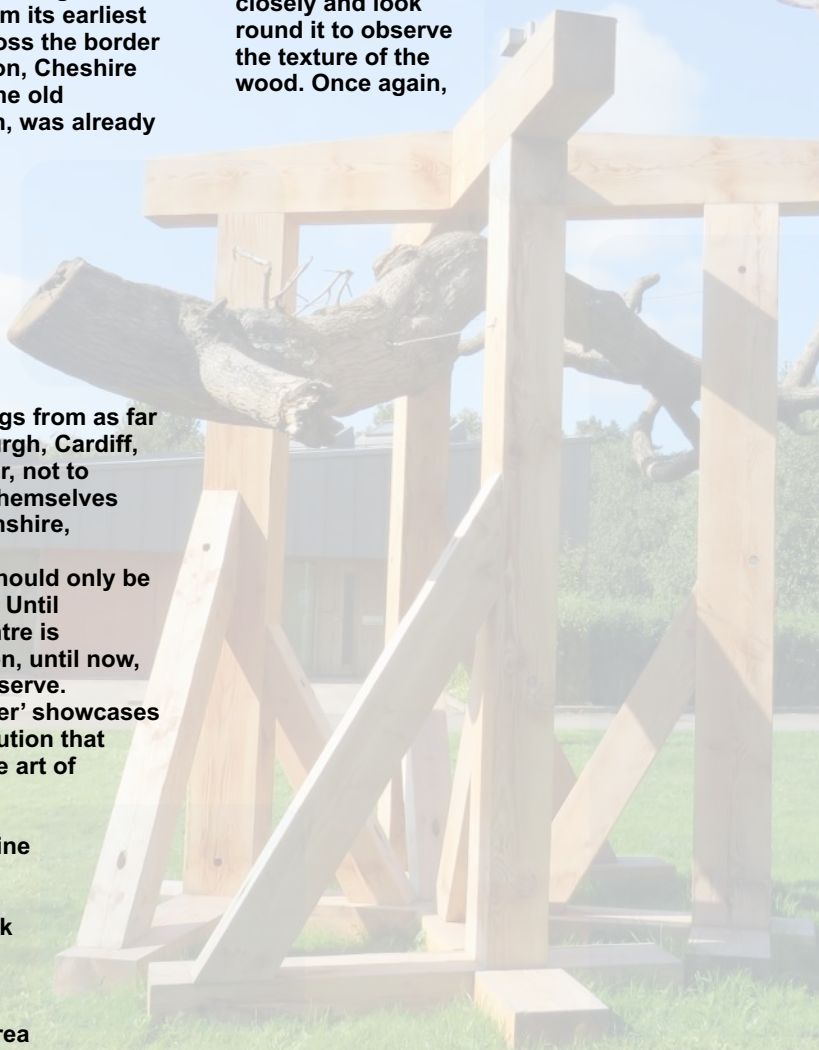
What could I possibly add to these encomia? Only that my wife and I have followed and supported the Centre, now part of the Denbighshire Lesiure Ltd portfolio, from its earliest days when we came across the border from our home in Farndon, Cheshire to see the latest show; the old building, modest enough, was already being celebrated for the quality and range of its exhibitions. Then, we were among those from well beyond the local area who made special trips to Ruthin to see their latest offerings.

Now, its mailing list includes the lovers of beautiful and useful things from as far away as London, Edinburgh, Cardiff, Macclesfield, Manchester, not to mention Ruthin people themselves and others from Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham.

Nobody, of course, should only be satisfied with past glory. Until September 18th, the Centre is redressing what has been, until now, something of a male preserve. 'Mastery: Women in Silver' showcases the fast-growing contribution that women are making to the art of contemporary silversmithing. Not only that, the exhibition is a fine contribution to our multicultural society; of the 29 artists whose work is on show, eleven were born abroad: China, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Israel, and Korea are represented.

While you're there, don't neglect to

go outside the building to look closely at John Merrill's sculpture, Tipping Point (passers by often stop to admire or to be puzzled). Merrill describes it as 'a segmented branch of a Welsh tree hung by a single chain from a Douglas fir tree'. Go closely and look round it to observe the texture of the wood. Once again,



the Centre is interested in the way craft contributes to thought about many other contemporary issues. Merrill observes that wood 'is a fundamental element in our human existence, generating oxygen, provides shelter, and warmth'.

These words go well alongside the forthcoming exhibition, inside, 'Basketry: Rhythm, Renewal and Reinvention', which runs from September 25th till January 9th, 2022. Come in to realise that basketry is 'a craft of our time, and at the vanguard of sustainability'.

I have, very occasionally, heard people suggest that that the Centre is guilty of elitism in its choice of works to display or sell. To that, the first reply must surely be the old adage that 'nothing but the best is good enough for the workers'! But the criticism also neglects to mention the centre's fine record of what might be called 'community crafts'. Staff are actively involved in 'raising the bar', encouraging us all, young and old, to 'cross the threshold' and create their own crafts. Many now practising craftspeople have surely started by getting their hands sticky and dirty at the Ruthin Crafts Centre.

Personally, I will never tire of enthusing over the architecture of the building itself: its splendidly irregular roof; the pyramidal windows which light some of the studios; the courtyard and its benches. And that's just the outside. Inside, the galleries are so flexible and adaptable that it is almost as if they were rebuilt every time there is a new exhibition.

In the not too distant future, surely, the building ought to be 'listed', a matter indeed for the Civic Association to take on board; 'heritage' is not just a matter of ancient buildings but also of the best of those most recently imagined and realised.

Brutal, from Page 1

the taming of traffic on) St Peter's Square. The improvement of the lot of pedestrians who often struggle to cross the wide junctions that lead onto the roundabout remains the top priority, to return the heart of the town to its position of glory for people and not dominated by traffic or parked vehicles.

The Civic Association is therefore rather hopeful that, added together, these changes will help to alter the ambience of Ruthin, making it a town once again to enjoy, savour and in which to spend time.



One other element of the proposed changes concerns pavement parking, which could be specially forbidden. Currently, the offence is driving over rather than parking on the footway.

It's only when you have to push a baby carriage or wheelchair that you notice how endemic pavement parking is, in both the town centre itself and also in residential areas.

¹ Resources cannot permit a wholly scientific survey but ours does reflect the position as we saw at the times of our counts this year. 57 per cent from 9 a.m. onwards (higher percentage beforehand).

Progress on Site



There can only be one possible explanation for last month's strange markings that appeared on the Rhos Street carriageway outside Rhos Street School. That they coincided with a three-week long water leak was mere coincidence.

The glyphs actually emanate from Rhos Street School itself and therein is the answer to the conundrum: we at last have a potential buyer for the site and the coloured symbols are part of their initial site investigations.

This is two years after the County Council marketed the site. Readers will recall that in 2019 Ruthin School was poised to purchase the site for, among others, its music department. Instead, the school governors had other things to think about and they dropped out. There was a further tender in 2020 but this, too, came to naught.

Now, though, matters look much more positive for the site, one that we know has been the subject of considerable vandalism and a proliferation of buddleia.

What do we know? The first thing is that we as yet have no idea as to what will happen there. It's likely, though, that the site will terminate as housing. The Market Town of the Future 2019 update suggested that the site would make a good residential site and it's hard to disagree with that

conclusion. After all, it's within walking distance of the town centre. It would be especially suited to older people, being close to the hospital and the soon-to-be relocated Mount Street Clinic.

If housing, the developer will likely demolish the school building. Whether from an informed source or not, that's been said on Facebook. Without demolition, how else would it be able to work on the site? Attempts to list the site have failed, as there are other better examples of a school of its type, kind and size.



Meanwhile, work continues on the extension to the hospital site, with the new Mount Street Surgery annex being used as a temporary entrance to the hospital, while the road into the site is widened and improved to include a new footway.



Can you please help us?

The Civic Association is looking for someone who can continue our work in keeping an eye on local planning applications. It requires only several hours a month. You'd need online access.

If you have ever been involved with planning applications, heritage, design, conservation or if you just have a general interest in any one of these areas, we'd love to hear from you.

You'd be invited to each Civic Association committee—but this isn't strictly necessary if you'd prefer to prepare a short report every month.



For further details or to volunteer, please contact the Secretary, Peter Daniels on Ruthin 704256 or cymru@clwyd.org

Ruthin & District Civic Association

'Heritage Building' Remodelled

By the time you read this, the systematic destruction & modernisation of one of our 'heritage' buildings will likely be complete.

Before you groan, please read on.

We refer to 'Agincourt', named after the 15th century English victory over the French. Agincourt is (or was) that singular property on Denbigh Road, converted by the late Mike Hession. He spent thousands to make his typical 1960s suburban three-bed detached design something exclusive. Externally, he tried to give it a mock-mediaeval look, with false timbers, a well and even a moat. For his troubles, he managed to get himself an effusive report in the the Free Press (the 1980s equivalent to Facebook). Inside, there was more wood than at Nantclwyd y Dre. The rooms were heavily panelled, thick with excessive wood, often in decorative patterns.

The good natured Mike died in September 2019. His house was marketed from November that year. Cavendish Ikin called it 'A unique and very distinctive three bedroom detached

house, a prominent feature for many years on Denbigh Road'. It was valued at £210,000 and subsequently reduced to £200,000.

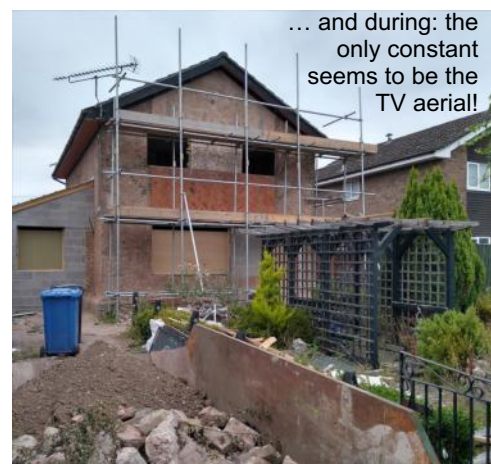
It didn't sell. We can only assume that it changed hands off-market. Builders are now spending thousands to return Agincourt to a family home. It's being stripped bare inside and out. Gone is all the wood and the moat. At £359,500, it now presents 'an exciting and rare opportunity to buy a three-bedroom detached house currently being remodelled and refurbished to provide a contemporary and spacious family home'.

It's 2021 and it must include that now de rigueur home office, described by Cavendish Ikin as 'A private study ideal for home working [with] view over the front garden and radiator'.

Taken literally, an outside radiator is perhaps a little extreme and we're not sure why the builder is heating the front garden. We doubt the waiting English army at the Battle of Agincourt benefited from such luxury in October 1415.



Agincourt before...



... and during: the only constant seems to be the TV aerial!

Protecting Highways Heritage Features

In June 2021, we asked members for items or structures on the highway that they felt should be considered for some sort of protection. With thanks to those who responded, here is the current list. Some of these aren't strictly 'on the highway' but we nevertheless feel that they warranted inclusion

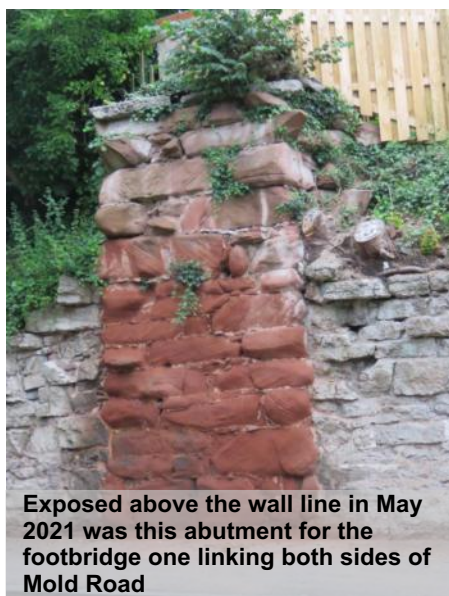
- The two finger-posts (traffic signposts) both close to 100 years old, one on Mwrog Street, opposite Lôn Fawr; and the other on the B5015 at Galltegfa (incidentally, what happened to the finger board pointing to Cerrigydrudion? It was there last year but has only recently disappeared).

- There are a small number of white-on-black enamel street name plates, two stating 'Mwrog Street' and one each for 'Borthyn' and 'Record Street'. They are in a font popular at the time. This type of name plate went out of popularity at about the time of First World War. They are therefore likely to be over 100 years old.

- Sundry inspection covers at various locations in town and in residential areas, marked 'Post Office Telephones'. These date from the 1970s or earlier. There are also some covers stamped or riveted 'British Telecom' or just the stylised 'T' from between 1980-1991.

- Round-topped concrete 'GPO' markers, one on Bryn Goodman in front of a unique concrete fence; and a second on Well Street at its junction with Record Street.

- Round-topped concrete MANWEB



Exposed above the wall line in May 2021 was this abutment for the footbridge one linking both sides of Mold Road



Bryn Goodman GPO marker post and unique concrete fence

marker post near Moel Fammau car park.

- Several sanitary inspection covers in the footway on Well Street, one marked 'Gittins & Beech, Ironmongers, Ruthin'; a second 'R Beech & Sons, Ruthin' and a third 'Herbert E Aldrich, Ruthin'



- Two more sanitary inspection covers, this time on Clwyd Street, one in the courtyard opposite the newsagent and the other in the access to the bakery. Both marked 'Gittins & Beech'.

- Gully grill in Haulfryn unusually stamped 'Flintshire County Council', presumably used pre-1996. Note that there are also a number of similar grills stamped 'CCC' for Clwyd County Council.

- Post Office Telephones junction box marked 'GPO' outside County Hall, in faded though traditional pre-1970s khaki.

- There is a Ruthin Borough Council plaque attached to Clwyd Bank, Clwyd Street.

- The Civic Association has installed over 20 green plaques throughout town.

- There are boundary stones incorporated into walling to the rear of Crown House, one of which is becoming illegible.

- A faded advertisement for the Railway Stores can still be discerned, facing Well Street on the corner of Station Road on the first floor of a building.

- Several sluice valve concrete marker posts (marked 'SV') in town and in residential areas, some of whose plates are either now missing or becoming detached.

- Unusual round-topped stone marker

post bearing the initials 'BRGL' on Well Street.

- There is a 'Lucy' electrical switchgear box at Bryn Rhydd, dating from the 1960s. This is in poor condition

Pont Rhyd y Gwaed, Rhewl

Lynette Hughes writes, 'The thing of interest to me isn't strictly a highways item, though if it were to be attended to would need the involvement of the Highways department. In the wall of the bridge across the Clywedog in Rhewl, on the main Denbigh road, a poem is carved, in the form of an 'englyn'. It commemorates a battle that took place there during the Civil War, when the wounded were taken to The Grange, then called Rhydybill. The first line of four reads, "Pont rhyd y gwaed" (The bridge of the ford of blood).

'I grew up in Rhewl and learned about it then, but I doubt whether many people in Rhewl today know it's there. The stone is very dirty and the poem hard to decipher, quite apart from the bridge being busy and pedestrians would want to cross it quickly. If the stone were to be restored, it would certainly need the Highways Department to take action to ensure safety.'



The plaque is dated 1819. and the englyn is as follows:

Pont Rhyd y Gwaed

penlan (pentan?) y gwir

*Sail fa ei sylfaen ni Sgudwir dda
odieath am y ddwedir oes a hon hyd
oesoedd hir*

Menna Jones and Harold Jones add a loose interpretation: pentan is hearth, gwir is truth and sail is foundation.

The next line translates roughly as 'it's foundation will not be shaken'. Line three seems to say 'it is said that this is excellent' and the last line 'this will last for many years to come'.

We also know of an inscription on one of the bridges at Berwyn, Llangollen, commemorating the coronation of king Edward VII. Those at Rhewl and Berwyn rather suggest there may be other bridges with unseen engravings on them.

Do you know of any more, including within the villages around Ruthin (which are under-represented)?

Transforming Towns

'Transforming Towns: designing for small communities' is a must-read for visionaries and our elected leaders

Given its price, it's fair to say that few of us will be buying this book, even if it would make a colourful, well-designed and thought-provoking addition to the coffee table. Its main market is town planners, economic development officers, local government decision-makers, college lecturers & students, architects... and visionaries everywhere.

In this context, 'small communities' are the everyday country & market towns and villages the likes of which we see scattered throughout the land. They occupy the 'usually neglected' and awkward policy space, between a concentration on larger metropolitan areas or in tackling deeper rural problems. Author Matthew Jones suggests that small towns are 'often where urban and rural policies collide', yet such towns often gain few benefits of either.

A characteristic 'small town' would usually be dormitory in nature, where people work or shop farther afield. Recognise this? It would often be bypassed by people going elsewhere: to urban centres or to the countryside.

The author suggests that 41 per cent of small towns are 'clone towns' with an identikit centre, whereas 36 per cent are distinctive and characterful 'home towns'.

It will be obvious into which category Ruthin fits. It's unclear as to whether the remaining 23 per cent is made up of larger settlements beyond the scope of the book.

A 'home town' has a number of characteristics:

- A perceived higher quality of life, attracting incomers, including retired people, seeking a perceived slower pace
- Still some semblance as a service centre for its village hinterland (e.g. the agricultural mart)
- Dominated by a single large employer (e.g. Denbighshire County Council)

■ A dormitory settlement, offering a 'small town' lifestyle in exchange for distance travelled (and the benefit of good primary & secondary education).

Then there is the knotty problem of the peripheries to small towns, all of which have grown thanks to the reliance on the private car. Does the following quote from the book resonate? 'These anonymous estates of housing, retail, business parks and industry have scant response to place and do little to encourage community'. The author is not keen at all on the proliferation of what Pete Seeger in his 1963 political satire called 'Little boxes made of ticky tacky... and they all look the same'. Jones says, 'Suburban estates offer little to enhance distinctiveness or encourage community'. Yet, we most of us live or work there!

Obviously, the book majors on the problems associated with small settlements: the decline of the high street; reducing footfall; and the closure of banks. I think people in Ruthin can identify with all of these. As a result, many small towns have begun to lose their cohesion and sense of place. This may be the case in, for example, Queensferry, but we have yet to reach this point in Ruthin although with sharply declining footfall, how long with it be before we might?

The Available Solutions

The negatives can be reversed through 're-imaginings as to who and what the town centre is for'. Jones suggests they they lie in towns that:

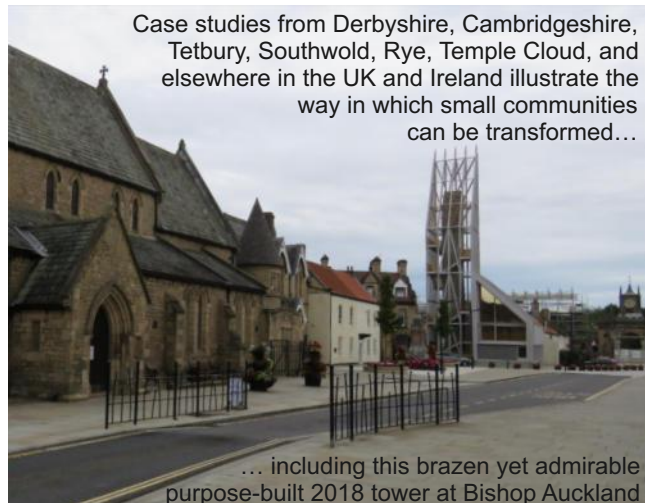
1. Develop their purpose beyond retail
2. Make good use of heritage assets
3. Create attractive space
4. Ensure that the public realm is safe & attractive, for walking, lingering and socialising.

The book considers towns with a population under 50,000. As such, Rhyl and Wrexham fall comfortably within this limit, yet among the case studies can be found not our municipal neighbours but Ruthin itself. Ruthin seems to be a metaphor for the four solutions, above.

Jones himself was involved in the Town Council's 'Ruthin Market Town of the Future' exercises and it is this and its results that he uses to explore the future of a country town with a population under 6,000.

The Ruthin 'masterplan' apparently came to pass because the

Case studies from Derbyshire, Cambridgeshire, Tetbury, Southwold, Rye, Temple Cloud, and elsewhere in the UK and Ireland illustrate the way in which small communities can be transformed...



... including this brazen yet admirable purpose-built 2018 tower at Bishop Auckland

Town Council found itself increasingly 'powerless in the decision-making process in their town', commissioning Jones et al 'out of frustration with [the Town Council's] role in town planning decision making.' The Town Council had opposed 'numerous' developments but had found it had limited power to resist development or propose alternatives.

The results are well known to us. The ideas generated tackled each of the four points above, in an incremental approach, with largely small scale, affordable interventions. Suburbs (if ours can be called as such) have been reconnected via pedestrian and cycling improvements. The art trail was an early improvement, including tree planting along Market Street. We have secured Yr Hen Lys. This included a part played in the imaginative pedestrian improvements for Market Street and Well Street which, as we know, were perhaps just a bit too revolutionary for the town. But, let's face it, with climate change that has manifested itself in an ultra-wet August yet a record-breaking hot July, the balance between active and car travel will have to be addressed.

Vision for the Square



Above all, the structured exercise through which the 'masterplan' went—identifying the town's strengths & weaknesses, evidence-based research over a number of years, public consultations—is a foundation for other developments as and when funding becomes available. As Cllr Gavin Harris says in the book, 'Incremental changes build on each other'.

■ **'Transforming Towns: designing for smaller communities' by Dr Matthew Jones is published by RIBA Publishing at £35 post free, available from Ribabooks.com or to order at the Mold Bookshop. 179pp.**



'We worked with the local authority and Town Council to assist in visualising the potential of changes to the streets around the town. A temporary one-way system first proposed in Ruthin Future vision was proposed to create wider pavements'

Seen and Heard in Graigfechan

Derek Jones reports

In my response to the recent questionnaire about Town and Around, I suggested, among other things, that the paper gave plenty of news and views about 'Town', but really very little about 'Around'. I also noted that I had recently met a woman from the country area who had never heard of the Ruthin and District Civic Association, let alone Town and Around; and she had lived in the area all her life and was a former community councillor! We surely have to take that seriously, and maybe a wider distribution of our quarterly might be part of the answer.

If that's to happen, those who live in the country areas need to be assured that the Civic Association and the magazine takes them seriously. To set the ball rolling, I have collected a few observations on the life of Graigfechan, where I live, and hope that it may inspire other villages in the district to follow suit.

We all recently received a missive through the door, giving notice that plans were being drawn up for building some 17 houses in the land just above the Three Pigeons. That there was to be some building on the site was hardly news; planning permission had been given several years ago, but it took some time for a builder who wanted to take advantage of it. The permission allows eight houses, but, as builders do, they drew up plans for double that number!

Reactions to the proposal have varied

between sympathy for the family whose house overlooks the site, to protests that the village cannot cope with the extra traffic which so many houses would bring with them. I have heard that some people are aghast at the architecture—'just like prefabs' said one irate gentleman. More positively, some can see that a small number of houses could help to 'join up' the village. Most of the people who have retired to Graigfechan are apprehensive at the prospect of months and months of endless noise and drilling.

Talking of traffic, it's been obvious that more and more traffic is using Graigfechan's only main road as a short cut to Llandegla, Llangollen or Wrexham, avoiding the tortuous turns of the Nant y Garth pass. Graigfechan has its own rush hours, morning and evening. But there's more: over several days during August, there was an endless stream of huge silage lorries going back and forth sometimes at break-neck speed; their wheels alone are about as tall as me! Agribusiness rules!

At the other end of the scale, Graigfechan Growers continues to flourish in its quiet and unpretentious manner. Allotments like this are surely part of the future of our battered planet; the Growers' produce is far more varied than that of the local supermarkets, and it tastes better too! Some recent research I have done shows that allotments are back, even in Moscow, Warsaw and Berlin.

Talking of taste, the Three Pigeons has re-opened under new ownership. Its

car park has a new, gleaming white, livery and its bar and sitting areas have had a makeover. The quizzes have re-emerged, but it's not yet evident that the customers have returned in sufficient numbers for the pub to flourish. More reports, please.

This brief survey raises questions about the future of villages. Are they destined to be mostly places to which we retire? What proportion of local villages are given over to commuters (to Chester, Wrexham, or even further afield)? Are there some imaginative plans to expand public transport (electric, of course) making local contributions to saving the planet.

It would be good to see some answers to these questions in our columns and I hope this piece is an encouragement to put pens to paper (and yes, I would be implacably opposed to seeing Town and Around available only in digital form; the age of paper and print is not yet over, and proper books and newspapers, which you can hold in your hands, are, for many of us, still much more user-friendly).



■ T & A Questionnaire results on p12

Foraging at Llanfwrog

Kathy Daniels leaves the the supermarket aisles for a return to nature

Foraging for herbs, vegetables and fruit is certainly more usually 'Around' than in 'Town'. The recent addition in town of planters by Ruthin Incredible Edible, though, means that foraging is also now enhanced in Ruthin itself.

But it is to Llanfwrog need to go to benefit fully from Sue Marie's expertise on foraging. She's the so-called 'Foraging Farmer's Wife'. With Vale of Clwyd Mind, she has hosted a small number of foraging courses. They involve a ramble round the Llanfwrog community garden and the outer reaches of land belonging to the community centre, in order to discover what edible goodies are on the menu.

Before embarking, Sue always gives important safety advice: **first, if you are at all unsure about the plant you see before you, don't pick it. Secondly, and for obvious reasons, only gather plants from above dog height.**

Plants that could safely be gathered included:

- Dandelion leaves (young ones for salads; the older as a substitute for spinach)

- Dock seeds, which can be ground and used as a flour.

- Cleavers, where the young shoots can be steeped in boiling water to make a tonic.

- Bramble tips make a good tonic.

- Yarrow, famed for stimulating blood clotting and may also reduce stress hormones. The peppery smell apparently makes it a popular addition for soups. Usually confined to grassland, yarrow is difficult to find in the community garden but the Denbighshire rewilding project has certainly allowed pockets to grow on the new local wildlife meadows in town.

- Although not in season at the time, acorn were discussed as a source of flour. These, apparently, may be used after boiling, to remove their natural tannin.

What fascinated me the most was the nettles. I knew you could make soup, tea and beer from the the leaves but hadn't realised that nettle seeds from the female plant are considered a 'super-food' and can help the body adapt to physical or psychological stress, and that's the tip of the iceberg. The Foraging Farmer's Wife makes chocolate truffles which she rolls in nettle seeds, though

sadly, not on this occasion. We did, however, gather plantain leaves and were shown how to make plantain slave, an antiseptic.

On our return to the Mind allotment, from our foraging expedition, we were treated to a bramble leaf tea, lemon balm and wild chamomile ice tea, prepared earlier. To finish, we were treated to a semi-foraged tapas lunch, including a freshly picked and prepared herby salad courtesy of the Mind allotment (raspberry and elderflower dressing, crunchy nettle pickle, crispy potato skins and foccacia bread.



Peers Memorial Update

Have your say about the town clock's restoration plans, says Fiona Gale

It was in the March 2021 edition of Town and Around that we raised the issue about the condition of the Peers Memorial & town clock. Since then, things have come along particularly well with the town clock restoration committee making good progress month on month. The committee is a group of local people, each with different expertise, with the sole objective of developing a project and seeking funding to repair and conserve Ruthin Town Clock.

As more people are now aware, the town clock was built in 1883 as a memorial to Joseph Peers, a local man who was Clerk of the Peace in Denbighshire for over 50 years in the mid 19th century. It was designed by the prominent Chester architect John Douglas and is now registered with Cadw as a Grade II listed building.

In May, the committee, after a competitive process, appointed a Conservation Architect, Elinor Gray-Williams, based on her extensive knowledge and experience in the field. Until 2019, she worked at Donald Insall Associates, when she started her own company. She was appointed for this project based on her

wealth of experience. She has worked on numerous restoration projects such as Portmeirion, Caernarfon Town Walls, the buildings of the Bardsey Island Trust and Bangor Diocese to name only a few, and she is currently working on a Conservation Management Plan for the Mediæval Walls at Ruthin Castle. She is also a member of the Design Commission for Wales, a judge of architectural awards at Yr Eisteddfod Genedlaethol and currently tutoring students at the Centre for Alternative Energy in Machynlleth.



Since her appointment, she has been responsible for studying the memorial's structure in detail, and preparing a schedule of works to the building, based on the problems she has found. She has now completed these plans, as well as cost projections for the works to be

carried out.

Now comes the time for these plans for the restoration to be shown to the local community and general public.

The community exhibition will be open 10a.m. to 4p.m. every day of the week at the Old Courthouse, between Saturday September 4th and 19th inclusive. The display will then be moved to the foyer area at Ruthin Library and will remain there till October 2nd (during library opening hours). There will be a questionnaire for people to fill in with their feedback. We would encourage everyone to attend and give their feedback.

There will be an evening talk for members of the Civic Association on Thursday the 9th of September at 7pm at the Old Courthouse: see the back page.

However we would encourage everyone to go and see the clock for themselves, before or after seeing the display so they can form their own opinion. We are mindful that this task of making plans is only the first part of the project, with funds still needing to be secured to undertake the work. Elinor has identified to the clock structure. For this plan-making stage, we have been very fortunate to secure funding from the

Clocaenog Windfarm Fund, Denbighshire County Council and Ruthin Town Council. The purpose of the project is not to change the clock or memorial, but to restore the structure and give it a few more decades in good condition at its prominent position.

Ring out the Bells

by Heather Williams

The bell ringers have again begun to ring regularly at St Peter's, Ruthin before Sunday morning worship and also on Wednesday evenings when they practice. The same cannot be said for the bells at Llanfwrog Church of St Mwrog & St Mary.

SS Mwrog & Mary's did ring again on the afternoon of August 17th, though, when some of the St Peter's team of ringers visited the church for the first time to view and also to ring the bells.

Peter Furniss, from the North Wales Association of Church Bell Ringers, who trained the new St Peter's ringers, first of all gave a fascinating guided tour of the tower. The group carefully ascended the tower's spiral staircase to the first level to see the ringing chamber where the ropes are, which also seemed to be a shelter for pigeons and doves—alive and dead.

They then went up to see the bells hung on an ancient wooden frame. There are

three bells there, which can be used in ringing bells full circle (which is the ringing which started in this country in the early 17th century).

Swinging a bell through a much larger arc than that required for chiming gave control over the time between successive strikes of the clapper. This enabled ringers independently to change the speeds of their individual bells accurately and combine in ringing different mathematical permutations, known as changes.

The oldest of these three bells is also the smallest (therefore the highest musical note). It was made in 1627 by Bryan Eldridge and

weighs 6½ cwt. The largest bell dates back to 1691, made by William Scott and weighs an incredible 11 cwt, equivalent to 1230lbs. This bell certainly took some

strength to pull! The middle bell was made in 1883 by the well-known John Taylor and Company, which is still in existence and recently refurbished the bells at St Peter's Church.

The oldest bell of all is not one of the three. It's the sanctus bell, dating back to the late 13th century, traditionally rung during Eucharist. This is probably the oldest bell of all in North Wales.

With the history absorbed by the group, they then went on to have a practice and the bells sounded out over the community again.



Coronavirus Chronicles Part 6

Wales entered Alert Level Zero on **August 7th**, 502 days after the initial March 24th lockdown, when in 2020 streets, shops, offices and schools were suddenly empty and a singularly quiet atmosphere descended.

From **August 7th**, the Welsh Government lifted most of its remaining restrictions, so that all remaining closed businesses could reopen, any number could now meet indoors including in pubs and businesses could relax distancing rules subject to local risk assessments.

Face coverings were still required within shops, in health care setting, on buses and in taxis. The larger than normal number of visitors significantly outnumbering locals on the Square, many from England, were usually compliant with the contrasting Welsh rules, though some needed reminding or realised they'd forgotten to wear their masks.

Of note on **August 3rd** saw the

number of deaths attributed to covid-19 in Wales reaching the official mid-year population estimate for Ruthin town. Denbighshire's cases per 100,000 were 332.1.

Meanwhile, of note on **June 6th** was Capel Pendref opening for face-to-face services for the first time; and on **June 15th**, Ysgol Brynhyfryd was closed for the day, following a single positive case among its cleaner workforce.

Chatwin's café re-opened in early summer (it had previously offered take-aways) and this was the final one to do so, other than Café R, which was under refurbishment over the season.

Although the isolation rules at the start of this academic year this September have changed, a fortnight before the July closure of the previous academic year (**w/b July 5th**) saw Brynhyfryd down to two year groups only, owing to self-isolating pupils.

Meanwhile, the close of July saw

some problems with the delivery of groceries to supermarkets in Ruthin. This was the result of a shortage of drivers and the so-called 'pingdemic'. Some normally well-stocked shelves were thin and in late July gaps appeared again, à la March 2020.

August 11th saw the Craft Centre re-open to its former 10 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. pattern but on six not seven days a week (closed Mondays).



Getting Tested

A member (who wishes to remain anonymous) reports on a visit to one of the rotating testing centres that pops up in Ruthin for three weeks at a time

It was like something out of a horror film.

You drive towards the throat of the channel to be greeted by two members of staff with masks and those I-have-authority yellow jackets. I wind down the car window to shouts of 'Wind it up! Wind it up!'

When sealed, one of the two approaches and shouts through the closed window. 'Keep your window closed'. This was an instruction, not a request. 'Do you have an appointment?' 'Yes'. 'What time?' '2.30 to 3.00'. 'Do you have a QR code on your phone?' 'What?' 'No'. I can drive to the third member of staff.

With my window up, he shouts to me the same questions. Given the 'No', he asks my name, moves off, speaks to another yellow jacket and then comes back with something on his phone that looks like my name & appointment. I

confirm.

Good. I can now proceed towards staff member five, who's job is only to control traffic. Following his gestures (but there's only one way to go), I pass him to another member of staff who also shouts at me through the closed car window.

He checks my details and then instructs me to open the window an inch, through which he carefully squeezes an envelope of charcoal-coloured plastic. Once half in, he quickly withdraws as from a rabid animal. No point in taking



risks.

Immediately, I snap the window closed again. Have I undertaken a covid-19 test before? 'No'. OK, he will guide me. He tells me to empty the bag. He then tells me that the outer plastic bag will now act as a rubbish sack which I must take home. Inside, there's a small sealed packet of hand sanitiser, which I am instructed to open and use. I now need to blow my nose with the tissue provided in the pack. Once crumpled, it goes in my new bin. There's a packet with a swab like a long q-tip. I have to open the packet and run the enclosed long-handled swab around my tonsils. 'But I haven't any tonsils'. 'Rub it around

where your tonsils used to be, then'.

Given that they were removed 52 years ago, I am not certain where this is. Am I turning into an awkward customer? The man explains where I should do this and where not and that I need to take care to touch nowhere else inside my mouth. I use the rear view mirror to help.

The swabbing process takes five seconds each side and makes me gag. Next, the same swab goes up my nose to where there's resistance and I rotate for 10 seconds. It tickles violently. The man tells me to take the plastic vial containing a clear liquid, remove the top, insert the swab q-tip downwards and snap off the piece of the swab into the vial at the point where the swab is deliberately thinner for this purpose. I then need to seal the vial. I place the vial in a second bag which, alarmingly, has a label marked 'biohazard'. I'm told to remove the self-sealing strip of the new bag and seal the bag up. The used strip goes into the bin, along with the q-tip arm.

That's it. The member of staff withdraws as I am told to wind down my window. Another yellow jacket, the seventh, comes towards the open window with what looks like a hand-held litter picker, which he extends by stretching at arms length as far as possible to grab the bag-with-sample from my open window and drop it into another.

Window up and I can proceed. I drive towards the exit, whereupon there is another member of staff whose purpose is to point out, even though there's nowhere else to go. I am now out of the testing centre and can drive home as another statistic, either positive or negative, having been reminded to isolate till at least the result (if negative).

Assuming the clumsy lab test centre gets the result right (and there's no guarantee of that, if you believe reports.

Denbighshire: 25 Years Not Out (Part 2)

In Part 1 (June 2021) we looked at the first 25 years of Denbighshire County Council. Here in Part 2, Peter Daniels concludes by considering the wider role of local government in our town

In 1997, Denbighshire purchased the four-year-old former ADAS building, at **Trem Clwyd**, initially for education and latterly for those in the planning and economic development departments. Closed in 2011, it was subsequently sold in 2012 to another major Ruthin employer, Jones Bros. The building is now called Tŷ Glyn.

Clwyd County Council's **area surveyor's office** and compound at Lôn Parcwr was in 2006 split and shrunken by the Northern Link Road. In addition to highways operations, it now doubles as the southern-most centre of waste collection (till the construction of the new unified Denbighshire), from where there is a running maintenance facility.

In Historic Denbighshire, the **Old Gaol** was the HQ for the pre-1974 County Surveyor's Department (the archaic term for highways). Used variously under Clwyd, it was till 1992 the site of the library. New Denbighshire took over the premises, developed the Old Gaol and used the 46 Clwyd Street frontage as administration offices, latterly for its countryside & heritage staff, till its closure in 2015. It is currently unoccupied. The main building also houses Denbighshire's archive.

From 1992, the branch library in Record Street is in the former 18th century **Record Office**, which itself was built for the storage of records for the assizes & quarter sessions held there and which acted as the old shire hall.

Once the offices of Ruthin Borough Council, the **Town Hall** remains within the County Council's portfolio. It played its part in local affairs especially at the genesis of the current County Council. Till the completion of Yr Hen Lys, the Town Council rented accommodation there. It continues as home to the County Council's Ruthin Registration Office which, under normal circumstances, is open to the public thrice a week. The Unison trade union uses the offices and the Ruthin Food Bank rents space.

The recently demolished **hutments on Llanrhydd** to the rear of the old Ysgol Pen Barras were previously used as accommodation for social services & education staff.

Tucked away at the rear of Lôn Parcwr is an unassuming warehouse known as the **Corporate Store**, in which the County Council's modern records are stored for at least the minimum statutory term.

Castle Mews on Well Street was the offices of the former **Ruthin Rural District Council**, active till 1974.

Now accommodation for Ruthin School, **Heulfre** off Mold Road was once among Historic Denbighshire's portfolio for education administration. We considered Heulfre's history, especially as the HQ for the Denbighshire Constabulary in the March 2019 edition, at v.gd/radca.



Local Government Evolution in Ruthin

1836—reforms establish a modern, elected, Ruthin Borough Council, under the Municipal Corporations Act 1835

1889—historic Denbighshire created as an administrative county, under the Local Government Act 1888, with the construction in 1908/9 of its Ruthin familiar home

1895—creation under the Local

Government Act 1894 of Ruthin Rural District Council

1974—Denbighshire and Flintshire merge into the Mold- not Ruthin-based County of Clwyd, under the Local Government Act 1972. Also includes Edeyrnion, formerly in Merioneth

Also under the 1972 Act—formation of Glyndŵr District Council housed at Ruthin (and Chirk), upon the merger of the boroughs of Ruthin, Denbigh & Llangollen; the rural districts of Ruthin & Ceiriog; the Wrexham Rural

District parishes of Llangollen Rural & Llantysilio; and the Edeyrnion rural district

1996—welcome home. Merger of parts of Clwyd County, much of Glyndŵr District and all of Rhuddlan Borough into the 'principal area' of Denbighshire, under the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994. Also includes Trefnant & Cefn Meiriadog, formerly with Colwyn Borough

2006—March 31st sees the opening of County Hall, 15 years ago.

New Town Clerk

In addition to The Old Courthouse being open and hosting exhibitions, it is also where you will find the office for both the town clerk and the Old Courthouse manager. Siân Clark has recently been appointed Ruthin clerk, while Kate Marcus has been in post as the Old Courthouse manager (and deputy town clerk) since October 2019. Siân's role is for 25 hours a week and here's a flavour of her background and interests.

Siân's professional background lies mostly in local government and she for many years she worked for local authorities in the west midlands of England in the field of 'democratic

governance' which we translate to mean the running of council business, especially alongside councillors. This makes her very experienced and qualified. Having returned to Wales initially to work for the Wales Audit Office, Siân changed her focus to support governance and constitutional matters for an agricultural member-led body.

For a number of years, Siân attended the Welsh School in London prior to moving to near Dolgellau where she spent the majority of her upbringing. Much of her school holidays were spent in Denbigh, at the home of her

grandparents, both of whom were active in their community.

In 2016, Siân choose to settle in the Ruthin area and, as one who enjoys walking, was naturally attracted by the glorious hills and scenery as well as the town and all that it has to offer. She enjoys the friendship and camaraderie which is attached to being a member of Côr Rhuthun and volunteering has provided her with a good insight into the local community. Working closely together, Siân and Kate look forward to helping the mayor & town councillors further develop Ruthin for businesses, residents and visitors.

Changes in Policing 1971–

Clumsy fingers at the end of a shift ponderously thumping manual sit-up-and-beg typewriters, with carbon paper and hard, brittle circular 'Triumph' rubber erasers. A desk staffed 8am to midnight. Officers often stationed in Ruthin for much of their working lives and who knew their community and its characters. Rural rounds with two officers visiting villages after hours in the local Constabulary Austin Morris Mini van (not even a proper car). There was even a Detective Constable based in Ruthin. That was policing 50 years ago.

During that period, the ranking officer at the Ruthin police station was an Inspector and under him were two Sergeants, six PCs, a half-dozen Specials, two traffic wardens, and also 'civilians', later known as police staff. The Detective Constable reported to the Detective Sergeant in Denbigh, working as a separate unit.

Also at Ruthin at the time were two Special Branch Detective Constables, whose role was always kept confidential... but, given the date, you would probably be right if you took an educated guess as to their role.

At times of need, Ruthin could call upon the resources at Heulfre, off Mold Road, once the the Denbighshire Constabulary headquarters. One of the duties of the town PC would be to meet with a key holder to Denbighshire's County Offices, to give access to vehicle registration details which, of course, were manual records in those days. This was never a regular event and would only occur where urgent, perhaps following a serious crash or crime when the vehicle owner was required immediately.

Ruthin police station also had cells for those unfortunate enough to be arrested but by 1971 had fallen out of use, in favour of Denbigh's.

By the close of the 1980s, the Inspector covered both Ruthin and Denbigh.

There were also four rural 'outstations' attached to Ruthin. To the public, these were more usually known as police houses and they were at Clawddnewydd, Llanfair DC, Llanferres and Llandegla.

The role of the outstation constable was to look after a number of villages in their locality. These could number quite a few. This, of course, was still in the age when many police had to rely on push bikes as the main mode of transport. For outstations, bicycles were singularly unsuitable and Gwynedd Constabulary (as Denbighshire Constabulary had by then become) provided some outstations with

what were called 'noddy bikes', which were essentially motorbikes of 150 or 200cc. They could seat one person only, with the rest of the saddle devoted to a large radio.

Even more so than in town, the 'village bobby' was able to cultivate appropriate relations with local people and especially farmers, to everyone's mutual benefit. There was a high degree of trust. That said, the right PC would show no favouritism when it came to farmers or others disregarding the law. When eventually officers were all upgraded from bikes to cars, it's told that one village bobby was concerned about drink drivers exiting one of his locals. He would wait at closing time (then 10.30 p.m.) ready to chase and apprehend.

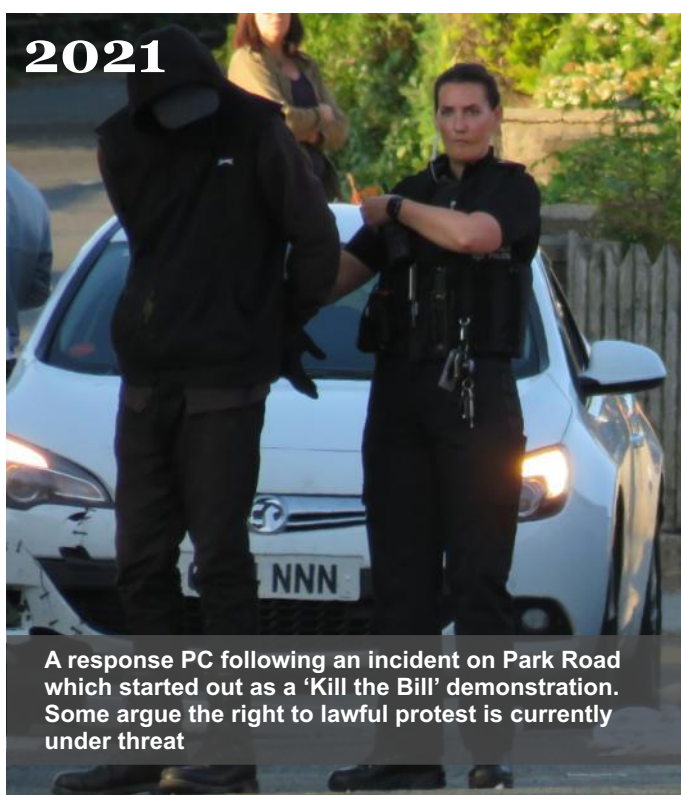
Locals would send out a sober decoy, who might 'exaggerate' his driving to lure the copper, while drinkers returned home without the inconvenience of their collar being felt.

In all honesty, there wasn't much work. Town police tended to view the village bobby as under-employed, especially if the village PCs grumbled about being redeployed to the town station to cover for absences. During the early 1980s, this practice escalated, as the role of the outstation came under corporate scrutiny, being viewed as less valuable when cuts were required. By 1988, two of Ruthin's four had closed and the other two would soon follow (although, sometimes, constables would continue to occupy them as homes). There was some rather muted public dissent but for each outstation closures the whole saga was swift, giving the public very little chance to object. Those who felt the closure most were probably motorists told to produce their documents, now having to go to Ruthin, something no longer necessary in the era of the instant police national computer. The final North Wales Police outstation lingered on to 2001 (this was not in the Ruthin area, though).

Changes before and during the Brumstrom era resulted in the 2000 closure of Ruthin's front desk. This previously had been the local face of the police.

Thereafter, the police became increasingly

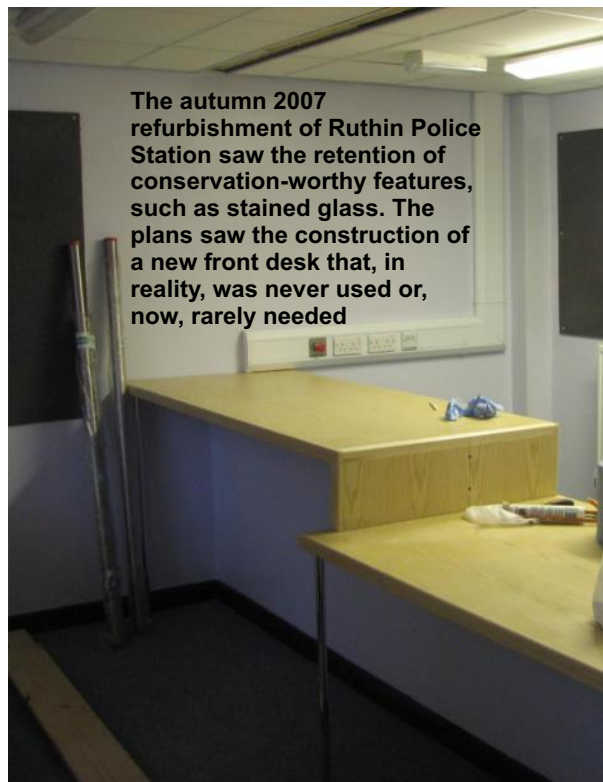
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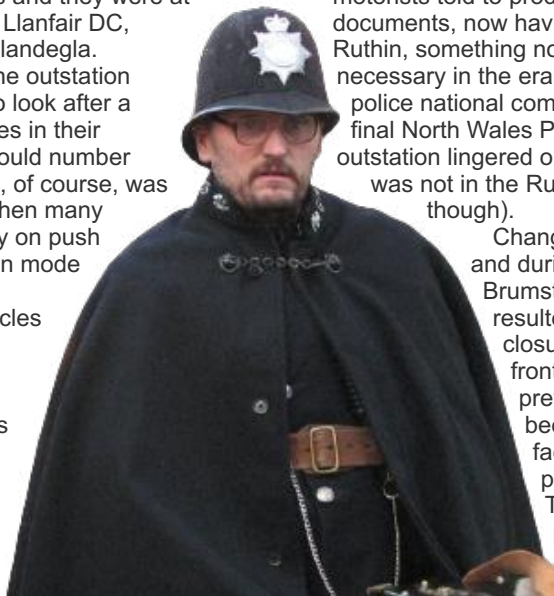
A response PC following an incident on Park Road which started out as a 'Kill the Bill' demonstration. Some argue the right to lawful protest is currently under threat

detached and officers once grounded within the community were replaced by those who were assigned not just to Ruthin but the division and who were prone to being transferred out at short notice. No longer would the local PC have the threat of 'I'll tell your father' and, with changing of social mores, this would likely now be futile, in any case.

Brumstrom refurbished Ruthin police station in December 2007. The cells had already closed (the nearest custody suite was now on St Asaph Business Park). Unthinkable 20 let alone 50 years ago, the police service now focuses significant resources on so-called e-crime and this is perhaps one reason why local stations have been



The autumn 2007 refurbishment of Ruthin Police Station saw the retention of conservation-worthy features, such as stained glass. The plans saw the construction of a new front desk that, in reality, was never used or, now, rarely needed



In spite of centralisation, North Wales Police still needs to deal with rural crime. In fact, rural and wildlife crime is a growing concern for the police. The selfish May 2021 chainsaw attack on nesting ospreys at Llyn Brenig brought this type of policing into the public eye.

It deploys two officers in Denbighshire & Conwy dedicated principally to rural offences. One, PC Heledd Wyn Evans, who lives in Llandyrnog, was recently featured on a BBC TV 'Countryfile' programme. Her role is to deal with poaching, badger baiting, theft of plant,

inappropriate cutting of hedges (between March and September) and, especially, livestock attacks. Much of the rural role now relies on intelligence rather than being able to respond from what in the 1980s was the local outstation building. Social media, apparently, is something of a valuable source of information. Ruthin animal mart is also a good networking opportunity to gather intelligence.

During the health emergency, the number of reported livestock attacks soared, owing to more people exercising their dogs in the

countryside and an increase in so-called 'pandemic puppies' whose owners misunderstand how dangerous off the lead dogs can be. Also during the health emergency, rural policing has reverted to a previous practice of checking on older people on farms who otherwise might no longer see anyone, even helping with shopping.

Confident in Welsh, the two are still able to build relationships with farmers but they are so spread, especially at weekends, that they may have to drop one problem for a more serious one.

downgraded still further. Perhaps that's inevitable. It saves the precept and, after all, Ruthin is a safe area in which to live.

The trusty Mini van is replaced by more appropriate—and roomy—response vehicles, usually Peugeot estate cars, now custom-built including a new modification, a rear cage to ensure violent people are contained. These react to emergencies only. Patrols (by car) were nevertheless re-established in March 2020, as general crime fell, when vehicles would again crawl around housing estates to ensure and enforce new lockdown rules. The police would rather these continued, as 'visible' policing creates confidence.

Today, the resource available at Ruthin police station may not be as 'thin' as people think. There are now few, if any, regular foot patrols but the staff numbers attached to Ruthin are not much different to 50 years ago. They just do things in a more appropriate way. There is one patrol sergeant and eight PCs, in shifts of two.

Alongside is a neighbourhood team concentrating on prevention and problem solving, comprising a sergeant, PC and three PCSOs, all of whom can support patrol officers at need. Compare to 50 years ago, this is different enough but, in addition, these days, officers can be pulled across the entire Conwy &

Denbighshire rural police district. Here, the police is trying to replicate the village outstation, providing a named contact for each community and ward.

The main calls on police time are anti-social behaviour (including car-related issues) and criminal damage. In Ruthin, theft and burglaries are few.

One change that will no doubt be welcomed by officers is the replacement of unwelcome paperwork. Reports can now be written Martini-fashion, 'any time, any place, anywhere', even from the seat of their police car and sent instantly via the 'cloud'.

The clumsily-operated old fashioned rat-a-tat of the manual typewriter back at the station has long been consigned to history, alongside the Mini van.

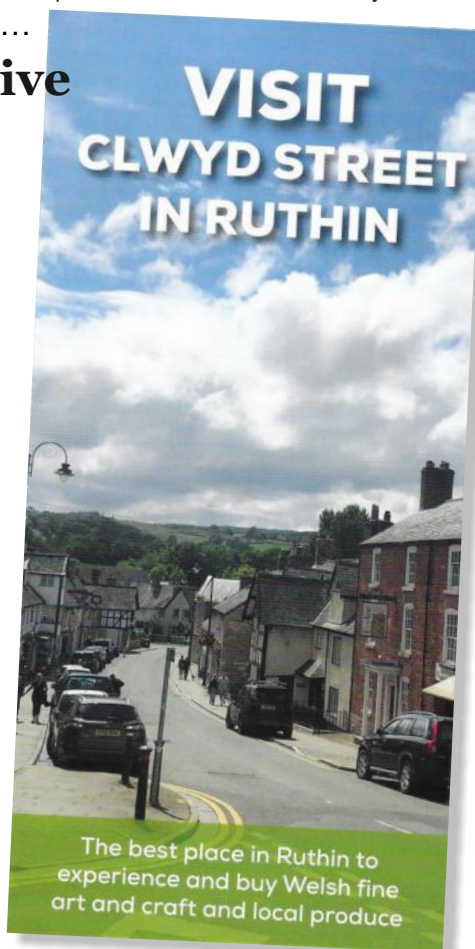
Clwyd Street Initiative

Respect to the traders of Clwyd Street for funding a print run of 5,000 colour leaflets paying tribute to the shopping virtues of this sometimes overlooked thoroughfare beyond St Peter's Square.

Aimed at visitors, the leaflet states that Clwyd Street offers 'The best place in Ruthin to experience and buy Welsh fine art and craft, and local produce'. It continues, 'Situated in mediæval buildings, we are a treasure trove of local information for walks, where to eat and how to make the most of your stay'.

The leaflet features 17 of the 37 businesses in Clwyd Street but, strangely, this includes one on the Square.

This is a prime example of businesses trying to help themselves and must be applauded. Attractively produced, the cover with its right hand sweep of the street and with hills behind, has a particularly nice touch within: thumbnail pictures of each supporting business usually feature their proprietors, giving the leaflet a personal feel. One even highlights a friendly-looking dog. Still, we cannot seem to shake off the incorrect name of Crispin Yard car park, though, referred to as Cae Ddol in the leaflet.



Also of note on Clwyd Street are the spectacular floral displays, thanks to some of the local businesses. This adds to the Town Council's fine floral efforts across town this summer.

Plas Coch

After last orders on August 29th came the closure of the Conservative Club, occupying the stone-constructed grade II listed Plas Coch. In recent years, the club has been struggling. After an extended coronavirus-related closure, it had only reopened in May 2021.

Its closure sees another of our heritage buildings unoccupied and in jeopardy. Its owners, the Conservative Association, will market the property. It may end up as a private dwelling.

If you believe the plaque on the face of the building, Plas Coch dates from no less than the 13th century and was gutted in 1400 by Owain Glyndŵr. More likely is the date of refurbishment in 1613 as a town house 'for the constable of Castell Coch'. In 1963, it became a 'banqueting hall' and for a time was in the care of borough councillor W R Jones. In 1977, the Conservative Club moved in. Today, the front elevation requires some conservation work.



Old Courthouse Update



You may have noticed that the Old Court House has been open this summer, for at least three days a week. The refurbishment was completed towards the end of 2019 and—for obvious reasons—it is only now that the building

has been able to get into its stride. There's still therefore an air of planning and testing, so the venue is slowly 'unfolding' in stages.

Local people but so far mainly those from afar have popped in, in some cases to take a look for the first time at the building and the condition of the work undertaken. A number of former bank employees, permanent and relief, have also been welcomed back.

Within have been two exhibitions. One entitled 'Tu Allan/Outdoors' depicted oil paintings by Helen Job and this has attracted something of a loyal following. All solo artist exhibitions will work on a commission basis.

The other was during what would've been Ruthin Festival week and this brought in an entirely different clientèle, including some who had been involved with the Festival in times past. The Festival Association had gathered and displayed its archive of material from festivals past, including photographs, press cuttings and promotional material.

Later in the year, the venue will welcome the Clwydian Art Society, once a regular exhibitor in the Town Hall. There are nascent plans for something connected locally with COP26.

One of its most important roles is to welcome visitors to Ruthin. To do so, Yr Hen Lys still relies on volunteers but the

sorts of questions asked of them are usually easy to answer. During the school holidays, identifying the remains of the gibbet has proven popular with families. It's also fascinating to hear from people who've been coming back to Ruthin year-upon-year, for the very special atmosphere they find hereabouts.



The Old Courthouse Committee has recently purchased large TV-type screens, one of which is within the building scrolling through a number of events and announcements; and another to a particularly high resolution will soon find its way to be viewed by the outside world, where the former bank cash machine once was. It will feature Yr Hen Lys and local information.

There's also progress on other displays and the showcase for town traders and local goods. Here, visitors during Sundays will have somewhere to spend their money.

Finally, the venue offers hot-desking.

■ If you're interesting in either hot-desking or in volunteering when the building is open, please contact kate.harcus@theoldcourthouse.wales

Helen Job 'Hiraethog'

Questionnaire: what you said

We're pleased to report positive feedback regarding Town and Around and the Committee should like to thank all those who took the trouble to complete our survey.

Respondents were first asked to rate Town & Around out of five (being the highest) and the score was 4.6.

Three quarters of respondents welcomed the additional number of articles in recent years. Nearly half felt that the variety of topics had improved and about a third felt the quality of the writing had done so, too.

We asked about our font. Nearly all respondents, bar two in fact, felt this was set at the correct size.

One respondent said, 'Sometimes I think some articles seem to have a bit of a bias towards certain views in the way they are written.' We don't think that this is the general trend, though: three quarters of respondents felt that Town and Around was usually impartial, with the remainder believing that it was always so.

Views were more diverse when it came to tackling controversial topics. 40 per cent felt that Town and Around should not be any more controversial. 25 per cent thought it ought to be more. The

remainder were unsure. A respondent stated, 'Of course Town and Around should be ready to be controversial. That ought to go without saying'.

When asked whether Town and Around was still relevant in the age of social media, the clear message from all but one respondent was that there was a need for Town and Around, principally because Town and Around offered more depth. Just over 75 per cent would resist Town and Around changing into some sort of blog, although about 17 per cent were unsure.

Commented one reader, 'As elsewhere the 'official' local press is of very poor quality. At least for Ruthin people, Town and Around makes up for the basic trivial content of the 'Free Press'. Town and Around only appears quarterly, but it covers serious local issues with more depth than what now passes for a newspaper.' Said another, 'I find that I engage with the written word much better. This is partly because I can put Town and Around on the table and pick it up and read it when I want'.

As for how often Town and Around should be produced, all respondents felt that quarterly frequency best suited

them. Here are some of the general comments received:

- 'Better quality paper and photos, please, even if it has to be paid for: well worth it for such a good informative local magazine. Well done, contributors!'
- 'Please keep it going. I can't get out and about now to attend the meetings... so Town and Around means a great deal to me'.
- 'Enjoying the improved quality of photography.'
- 'More from villages: could community councils provide info? Also walks and footpaths.'
- 'Seen in Passing is always interesting and encourages observation.'
- 'Colin Edwards account of Ruthin castle was interesting this month.'
- 'I like reading about the other villages and their history.'
- 'Town and Around... needs to be much more widely read, and if it became online only or, worse still, a blog, that feeling of remoteness from the general population would be intensified.'



Seen in Passing...

This summer, somewhat spoiling the St Peter's Square conservation area and in particular the soon-to-be-refurbished Peers Memorial are two rather bright red bins. Have they permission to park there and do they really need to be on public land?



There are nevertheless colours of a more sensitive nature to report. To the pleasing



array of doors along Railway Terrace comes a newly added pink one. And the Naylor Leyland Centre this summer was refurbished & the front painted a very rich blue. A nice change from the greys in town.



We trust that the gap it has left on the Square will be temporary, as Alton Murphy moved last month to the former Wern Vets building—after a lick of (grey) paint, at least to the front elevations, if not to the rear.



It seems that a resident took it upon themselves to mow land left wild at Bro Deg and, oddly, those at Bryn Rhydd demanded their patch be cut.



Otherwise, the re-wilding in Ruthin & district is starting to pay off with, for example, the appearance on at least two sites of then (un)common spotted orchids.



Such an effort in town this summer regarding floral displays but what of this forlorn patch on the Co-op's site?



Over the summer, Ysgol Brynhyfryd has at last removed the fencing around its lodge and, for the first time in years, the tidied up yet unused building is a fitting gateway to both school & from the east to the town.



The Coroner's Court at County Hall now has dedicated facilities & separate entrance from the rear car park.

This summer, important work continues on the trees by St Peter's entrance and to much acclaim refurbishment of the cemetery. Will Llanfwrog's be next?



How long does a well-used road last? The answer is the Northern Relief Road opened in October 2006, so 15 years. It was dressed this summer.



10 Years Ago

The town was riven by views on the new façade of a shop on St Peter's Square. A former café, Sadle Up and Cerrig & the Green Lady was at the time called 'Hardly Nickels/Faerie Pirates'. The proprietors decided to paint it purple and this brought out the best and the worst in people.



You would perhaps have expected the Civic Association to aligned itself behind the then County Conservation Architect, who was concerned at the paintwork on a listed building in the heart of the conservation area (he tried to persuade the shopkeepers to reconsider). At the 2011 AGM, however, there appeared to be feelings on both sides and so strong was one that a senior Civic Association member threatened to resign unless the organisation condemned the colour.

On the other hand, the 'purple shop' had its supporters. There were far more important things of concern in the town and beyond, they said, including shops at the time closing. Some thought the opposition petty. There was a petition circulating, in favour of the new colour.

The shop found its way into the Free Press, Daily Post and even the BBC's online pages, where you can still read at least two reports today.

The shop didn't last long and, of course, has since returned to more sober colours, painted twice as the Coffee Cabin. It's currently in racy matt vermilion and black, a contrast to the greys featuring in town at present.

Anyone for Tennis in Ruthin since 1873?

By Pam Alford

It was in 1873 that lawn tennis was first 'invented' and played at Nantclwyd Hall, just a few miles from Ruthin. The game quickly became popular and clubs began to be formed.

1920s—Ruthin Lawn Tennis Club dates from the 1920s, when one grass court was laid at the top of Bryn Goodman on land owned by the local bowling club. Later, a small club house was erected and a second court laid. The grass courts were later replaced by two hard courts.

1950s—by the mid-1950s, the condition of the two courts had deteriorated badly and the club house had burnt down. It was therefore decided to move to two existing courts at Ruthin Castle, which was then a private clinic. When, however, the clinic closed and the Castle was re-opened as a hotel, the Club had to leave.

1960s—in 1967 the Club bought the original land at Bryn Goodman, laid two courts and built a club house.

1980s—20 years later, it was agreed that the time was ripe for further improvement and, with the help of much local fund raising and a Sports Council grant, the courts were upgraded to an all weather surface. At the same time, the club house was improved and floodlights were installed.

2000s—these facilities served the club well for nearly another twenty years until the deteriorating court surface and

growing membership led to the decision to sell the courts for housing. With the cash available, the club was able to take the lead in establishing the Llanfwrog Community Association and installing the superb facilities which are now in use. The new tennis courts officially opened in 2007.



In the annual Tennis Wales Awards, which recognised outstanding achievement, the Club received the 2007 Club/Centre of the Year Award. The picture shows chairman George Flanagan receiving the trophy, with Pat Cash, Cedric Pioline, Paul Haarhuis, Jeremy Bates and Derek Redwood

Elwyn Salisbury Jones long term member of the Club died at the age of 80. He was a highly respected figure in tennis in North Wales. His death occurred shortly before he was due to be honoured with a Meritorious Service Award by the Lawn Tennis Association in recognition of his many years of outstanding voluntary service to tennis.

Salisbury Jones was an honorary life

member and president of Ruthin LTC, of which he was a long standing committee member and chairman for ten years. He had also served as Chairman of the Denbighshire LTA, the Clwyd LTA and was Chairman of the North Wales Association for eighteen years, before being made an Honorary Life Vice President.

He served on the executive committee of the Welsh Lawn Tennis Association for fifteen years and was its president in 1990 and 1991.

To mark the 75th anniversary of the North Wales LTA in 2000, he wrote 'Tennis in North Wales', tracing the evolution of the game in the region since it was invented by Major Walter Wingfield and played for the first time in 1873 at Nantclwyd Hall. His family donated a bench for use at the club in his memory.

2010-2012—three Members of Ruthin Lawn Tennis Club received the annual DP Thomas Award from Tennis Wales North in recognition of for their outstanding contribution to tennis: 2010 Pam Alford; 2011 George Flanagan; 2012 Sid Smith.

2016—Ruthin LTC was one of the clubs in Wales chosen to host The Davis Cup Trophy Tour, which was a hugely enjoyable and successful event for the club. There was continual on-court activity provided by coaches to tennis players from clubs, schools and centres in North Wales, along with the games and challenges for all provided by Tennis Wales staff. With so many people from the area calling in to see the cup and take photos, this event provided amazing publicity for both the town and the club.

Rambles with a Rucksack

I suppose it's the same everywhere. Locals can be accused of taking their town for granted. So, with July's introductory episode of series four of S4C's 'Codi Pac' came the opportunity to see Ruthin from an outsider's perspective. The Codi Pac formula is about discovery, and places to eat and stay, all characterised by excellent TV photography.

Presenter Geraint Hardy is known for his diversity, from S4C's Stwnsh to a hard-hitting examination of his mother's alcoholism. Codi Pac was on the lighter side.

Previous series have enjoyed almost universally sunny weather. The resultant bright footage was usually enough to 'sell' a particular location. Although broadcast on July 23rd, filming for the Ruthin episode was in March and Hardy himself was usually snuggled in a waterproof.

In point of fact, the sound technician, second cameraman and producer, all at one stage in shot, were complete with one hood and two bobble hats, and a waterproof cover for the camera! Trees were minus foliage and

leadens skies were the norm.

During Ruthin's 24 minutes of fame, we learnt that, for some, the town was the 'most charming in Wales'. Only for some? It was described as a 'pretty town in a beautiful area' within a 'large verdant valley'.

Codi Pac displays a bias towards



activities for younger people. Perhaps this is why S4C devoted what seemed like a long 2½ minutes to 'golff-droed' (footgolf) at Llanfwrog. In all honesty, Hardy was not that hot at it, unlike his mentor, Centre manager Bleddyn Jones.

The Craft Centre got two minutes and, outdoors, was 'the perfect place on a sunny day'. Except that it was not sunny.

Gareth Evans was the fitting choice for a three-minute tribute to Nantclwyd y Dre and the Lord's Garden (preceded by S4C's 'Garddio a Mwy' by a few weeks earlier). Evans was, after all, the County Council's architect behind the renovations.

There were several drop shots of the town's 'quite a few independent shops' and Hardy seemed to pause at Leonardo's door and then move on; his cameraman decided otherwise, though. Hardy managed to buy a woolly hat in just nine seconds flat from Wayfarer, left, for his 'next adventure', to Foel Fenni, which fellow woolly-hatted warden Ceri Lloyd wisely preferred to Moel Famau.

Codi Pac samples accommodation and local food. The Castle was an obvious location, with splendidly accommodating peacocks showing off.

The producers also chose Manorhaus, with pianist co-owner Christopher Frost accompanying. At other times, the musical portrayal seemed to shout 'hillbilly', with slide guitar accompanied by classical guitar and banjo.

I am rather surprised that Hardy isn't

Purses and Sow's Ears

'You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear'. The Welsh for this I overheard during the July days of the refurbishment work at B & M's Station Road premises. Standing opposite, those in conversation were referring to the state of the building at that time and, especially, it's age.

The Civic Association did contact B & M to get the 'low down' on the refurbishment but received no response. Judging by the new interior, they've spent a considerable sum on flooring, walls, ceiling, lighting, shop fittings and gondolas. They have knocked out some of the internal walls and provided a new return, extending the retail floorspace. It's really good to see this sort of investment, which is likely to secure the store and its jobs for years to come.

The new glazed entrance is now bright and modern, in contrast to the previous dim, sunless shadows, when you weren't exactly sure what you'd face inside. Let's be honest, the previous interior was ropey, grubby and uninviting.

The building itself probably dates from the late 1940s or early 1950s. It was built as a garage for the sale and maintenance of agricultural equipment & machinery, later cars. They sold Fordson tractors and were distributors of the British Anzani Iron Horse two-wheeled tractor, a tractor at the front operated by a labourer walking behind as if controlling a motor mower, ploughing.

Cars became more important. At one point, the garage traded as Jones Bros and is believed to be linked to the

company of the same name with branches elsewhere, including Abergele and Llanrwst. It seems that it was one of those outlets, then more common, where you could order any available new car of whatever make and they would source it for you. In the 1960s, it became Ford and Land Rover retail dealers.

As Northcott Garage, it is perhaps best remembered as a retail garage selling new Daihatsus of the early 1980s. This was a time when the Daihatsu Fourtrak became very popular among farmers, tradesmen and families. The chunky square Fourtrak was

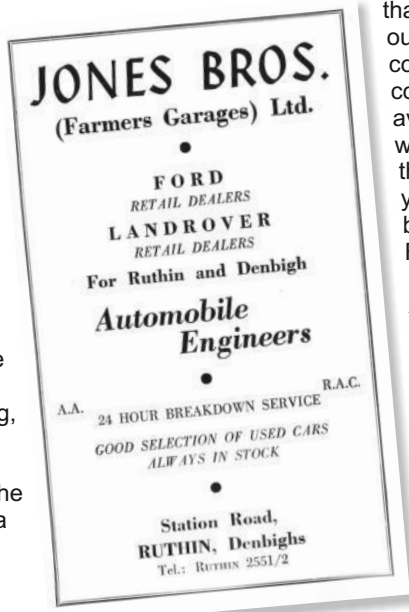
one of the few early available types of soon-to-be vogueish 4x4s. Much cheaper than Land Rovers but less well built, they enjoyed a brief spell of popularity before being overtaken by superior models.

In the mid-1980s, Prestatyn's Kwik Save was at that time converting older buildings for use as its stores and Northcott Garage was one such. Within, the Kwik Save was cheap and spartan, with warehouse-style shelving with splashes of red trim. Famously piled high at the entrance were plastic bottles of fizzy pop but there was a nod to fresh veg in an internal offshoot, to the right, trading as Coleman's. This was the space where more recently B & M sold Christmas trinkets and, latterly, stationery. This is now knocked through.

In January 2007, the store was refitted and reopened as Somerfield. Somerfield closed in March 2008 and the building

immediately opened as Bargainion B & M, using Somerfield's shelving only now replaced and, among other things, battered cast-off Marks & Spencer shopping baskets.

Looking around the lighter, cleaner, more spacious and refurbished B & M now, it's harder to see its retail past, though the building itself still screams 'motor car garage'. B & M nevertheless seems to have fashioned something colourful out of the materials it has inherited. Maybe, then, the old proverb about silk purses and sow's ears doesn't always apply.



twice his size, given all the food he has to eat, such as the perils of a travel presenter (or perhaps exercise like golf-droed helps him keep it off). One thing you do learn from watching previous programmes is that there are only so many ways in Welsh as in English of expressing how tasty something is. But Hardy had no complaints as to his Manorhaus food or, earlier, that from the



Hats, hood and rain-cover... and the laughing producer has 'codi ei phac', too

Sugar Plum Tea Room.

Overall, S4C mismanaged the weather but otherwise gave a good account of the town. A little drop of sunshine wouldn't have gone amiss. With visitors considerably outnumbering locals again this year, the Ruthin episode couldn't have come at a more opportune moment. We hope that Codi Pac has in some way promoted our town (in the same way that it has motivated my own visit to Machynlleth, for example, a previous Codi Pac choice).

Looking at Ruthin from outside and the conclusion was of a town proud of its past but able to live in the present, from the Craft Centre, the Clwydian Range 'augmented reality' app, halloumi & minted peas at the Manorhaus, to golf-droed. So new is footgolf that it has yet to feature at the Olympics. When it does, I'm sure Hardy wouldn't mind my saying that he should be overlooked for the team. He's welcome back to practice any time, though. Just bring the cameras.

Ruthin in Bloom

Businesses and the Town Council are to be commended for this year's floral settings. Are they the best yet?

This summer, walking around town, you cannot but appreciate the lengths to which the Town Council and traders have gone to provide colour through flowers.

Clwyd Street offered displays of note at The Salon and the adjacent nail bar. A Touch of Class was winner of best business floral display, below, with our Vice-chair & mayor, while Wetherspoon's was best pub.



Ruthin & District Civic Association

Ruthin & District Civic Association AGM 2021



The Ruthin & District Civic Association's 2021 Annual General Meeting will be held at 7 p.m. on October 12th, 2021 at the Naylor Leyland Centre, Well Street.

This is a 'live' event and not held electronically. In order to comply with our risk assessment, please contact the secretary to book a place (Ruthin 704256 or cymru@clwyd.org).

We shall send the minutes of the 2020 AGM by email to all those attending and to anyone else who requests them.

2020 AGM Agenda

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on October 12th, 2020
3. Matters Arising
4. Chairman's Annual Report (below)
5. Treasurer's Report and Accounts
6. Election of Officers & Committee for 2021-22
7. Any Other Business
8. Guest speaker: Tom Barham

Chair's Report 2020/21

With the continuing uncertainties, 2021/22 was another 'slow' Civic Association year, very much the same as the previous one, for obvious reasons. With the October 2021 AGM nevertheless comes the possibility of returning to something like normal, we hope, when we shall again have a guest speaker, the first 'real' event since October 2019.

The highlight of the Civic Association's year has to be the virtual 'Open Doors' held in September 2020. This was something of a departure for us and it successfully filled the void left by the postponed 'live' event. May I express my gratitude to those who organised the event, which gathered a healthy number of online views. Because of the length of time to plan 'ordinary' Open Doors and the reliance on private individuals to make their homes and properties available, we have again been unable to stage an event this month. We did, however, belatedly bestow the Quayle Award for 2019 to the Town Council, for the sympathetic yet where appropriate contemporary restoration and modern use of The Old Courthouse. As I write this, we are concluding the Quayle Award for 2020.

And Town and Around as the most tangible part of the Civic Association has continued to offer its usual mix of interesting and relevant articles. During the Civic Association year, we published 42,839 words over 52 pages, equivalent to a 120-page novel. I was delighted with the positive results of the summer 2021 Town and

Around readers' survey, the full results of which are on page 12. In summary, readers said that they trusted Town and Around and found it a useful and anticipated part of the Civic Association's offer. May I thank all contributors and especially Peter Daniels, who willingly co-ordinates the contributions into a well-presented publication four times a year.

Your Committee is meeting more regularly now, albeit still virtually. We look forward to re-establishing the usual pattern of things in the months ahead, subject to any changes in restrictions, of course. May I thank the Committee for their help and support. The 2020/21 Committee comprised Heather Williams (Vice-chair), Robert Williams (Hon. Treasurer), Steve Beach (co-opted), Kay Culhane, Kathy Daniels, Harold Jones, Menna Jones, Liz Williams and Peter Daniels (Secretary).

I should like to end by paying tribute to Harold Jones, who has lived in the Ruthin area for 33 years and who has been a long-standing member of the Civic Association and Committee. During his working life as an architect, Harold contributed throughout the county of Clwyd to various projects and buildings. He has written for Town and Around in both Welsh and English and was a valuable member of the Open Doors planning group, in particular translating the entries in Open Doors booklets. Over the last half-dozen years, Harold has kept a watching brief on planning applications and developments, raising issues where necessary. He leaves a void which I would encourage readers to consider whether they can help fill (see page 3). Along with our thanks, we wish him well in his move to the south of England to be nearer his family.

Anne Roberts MBE
Chair 2020/21

Membership and subscription information for 2021/22

Subscriptions to the Civic Association for the year 2021 to 2022 fall due on September 1st and we are pleased to announce that despite rising costs they will remain at the same level of £10 for individuals and £15 for joint/family membership.

This means that they will have remained at the same level for eight years.

Enclosed with this edition of Town and Around is a renewal of membership form for existing members who do not yet pay by standing order and for any prospective new members who would like to join us. **Please note that existing members who pay their subscriptions by standing order do not need to return this form.**

Our details to pay using internet or smartphone banking are as follows:

Account Name: Ruthin & District Civic

Town & Around is published quarterly by the Ruthin & District Civic Association. It is available from Ruthin Library (when fully open) and on townandaround.org.uk. It is delivered free to Civic 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 November 15th, 2021

Thanks are due to this quarter's contributors: Pam Alford, Kathy Daniels, Peter Daniels, Fiona Gale, Derek Jones, Dorinda Kostravenglis and Heather Williams; and with the help of Siân Clark, Roger Edwards, PS Richard Evans, Kate Harcus, Ron Hughes, Dilwyn Jones, Rob Price, Anne Roberts and PC Heledd Wyn Evans

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

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For any subscription queries, please email the Treasurer at ruthincivic@btinternet.org or telephone Ruthin 704998.

Peers Memorial Event

**Thursday September 9th at 7pm
The Old Courthouse with Fiona Gale**

Our first live event since the emergency for members and friends will be a talk about the Ruthin Town Clock Restoration Project by Fiona Gale MBE, together with an opportunity to see the exhibition about the project.



We must comply with ours and the Old Courthouse's risk assessments: booking is therefore required (please contact the secretary to book a place (Ruthin 704256 or cymru@clwyd.org).