

Town & Around O Gwmpas y Dre

September 2022

Quarterly comment & features from the Ruthin & District Civic Association

A Call to Reinstate Heritage Bridge

If in future we need to spend a large sum on bridge strengthening at Pont Howkin (see below), dare we ask for a reinstatement as close as possible to the original earlier structure, writes *Civic Association Chair, Anne Roberts*.

If the arrival of bollards (see page 2) on the footway either side of the bridge signals the fact that something needs to be done, should this then include a reinstatement?

It would seem to be an appropriate time to begin a campaign to press for a full and proper reinstatement.

Removing the current concrete construction and exposing the attractive three-arch bridge while restoring an original decking & parapet to the pre-1969 design would result in an attractive western gateway into town. Constricting the carriageway just a little to the original width would then lend support to try to channel unnecessary through traffic away from the town centre.

Cadw's listing of Pont Howkin recognises two things. First, the fine 1771 three-arch design by prominent architect Joseph Turner, now hidden. Secondly, that this 200 year old

bridge was 'mutilated in 1969 when the upper part was destroyed and a much wider concrete roadway built, obscuring the lower part from view.' The word 'mutilated' actually appears twice in Cadw's listing report.

The original underside of the bridge though invisible is constructed of bonny yellow sandstone, some of which is attractively veined. Restoration would return this part of Clwyd Street to its pre-1969 position, significantly enhancing the approach to town. Any heritage bridge would, of course, require at least one parallel pedestrian footbridge alongside.

Not as Controversial as at First Sight

Bollards appearing in July on the footway either side of Pont Howkin, Clwyd Street, initially provoked a contentious response. Within a week, the controversy had evaporated. Dare we say that the new pillars actually add something to an otherwise plain structure? Till the bollards, it was barely recognisable as a bridge at all.

It was in the late 1960s that Denbighshire added footways either side of Pont Howkin. Older readers will recall, till then, there was no pedestrian space on the narrow bridge and those on foot had to compete with traffic to cross the Clwyd on the bridge's carriageway. The Council placed two concrete spars at right angles across the bridge to add cantilever footways either side. At the same time, the old bridge was filled with a concrete saddle, upon which the council built the new footway and carriageway decking.

The cantilevered footways are weaker than the overall structure and this is one reason for the bollards. There is another, however, and that is this: beneath the modern structure and hidden from view is the remains of the handsome 18th century bridge. That older bridge shows evidence of overload. There's a longitudinal crack and in parts the arches are eroding.

This, by the way, does not mean there is

any danger or that the bridge is necessarily structurally unsound. Such erosion may have stabilised but engineers are not yet sure.

There are two possible reasons for this type of crack and, before any remedial work, the engineers need to determine the cause, lest they spend money needlessly in remedying the wrong problem.

One reason for the crack could be accidental vehicle overrun on the cantilevered margins (i.e. the footway). In preventing this, the bollards allow engineers to rule in or out whether the core weakness is a result of the cantilevered structure.

Is there much vehicular overrun?
Probably not but there have on occasions



Underside of Pont Howkin
with three arches and the
two concrete beams

been petrol delivery tankers part-parked on the bridge footway, awaiting access to Bridge Services. Plated at up to 44 tons, school pupil physics would indicate the exponential load of a moving wagon could now be dangerous.

If, after the bollards on the footway, the crack widens, then the problem will not be

Continued on page 2

View from the Chair

How Welcoming are we to Visitors? Feedback is not always positive

In May 2019, Ruthin achieved Coach Friendly Status. A year later and everything went on hold, thanks to coronavirus. Recently, the town clerk and I again met with the Coach Friendly Status awarding body. Our renewal application was successful. At the time of writing, Ruthin is the only town in North Wales holding this status. We can be justifiably proud.

That's the good news. However, we are still awaiting the creation of a coach drop-off and pick-up point on St Peter's Square to accompany our status. This is out of the hands of the Town Council.

As the summer has now slipped away, there are other frustrations. Volunteers at The Old Courthouse, myself included, report time and again

this summer that there is disappointment when visitors call to ask about attractions, only to be discouraged. Again this year, visitors to Ruthin are faced with the Gaol being closed, Nantclwyd y Dre only open for part of the week & the Cuning Green that acts as a special link between the two also closed.

I think we all understand the safety reasons why the Cuning Green path had to close but the length of time is again frustrating. By the time you read this, it will be coming up to a year. It was previously closed between 2013 and 2016 and again in 2017. Very little information as to the closure is available, when requested, regarding its re-opening. It simply remains another local closed amenity. The owners of the wall now need to act quickly so that the County Council can reopen the footpath.

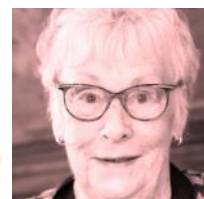
Flooding closed the Gaol in February 2021. The other affected properties, in the same area, have all been re-furnished and are once again occupied or trading. Not so the Gaol. It's pleasing

to see that during August there were tours of the site from the outside thrice a week but what we really needed is proper seven days a week access inside and out. This is second Easter to September that we have lost.

Unlike its Llangollen counterpart Plas Newydd, Nantclwyd y Dre has limited opening, yet both properties are managed by the same local authority. Plas Newydd is available to visit seven days a week, with café and tour guides.

As a group, the Civic Association is fully engaged in trying to increase footfall in and to the town. For example, we are able to 'Open Doors' again this month. What we need is some support from the County Council to try to attract visitors and residents alike to view the wonderful wealth of attractions we have to offer.

Anne Roberts MBE
Chair of the Civic Association



Pont Howkin, from from Page 1

the cantilever and would be the sheer weight of the concrete on the old bridge.

The bollards therefore determine exactly where to spend what is likely to be a high six figure sum.

Of course, if the crack remains stable, it's likely that the bridge will also remain stable and the bollards can go. But, by then, we would probably miss their aesthetic appeal.

After all, they were chosen to marry as much as possible with other heritage bollards in town.



Bollards added on both footways on Pont Howkin in late July 2022

Not so Much a State of Distress as a State of Flux

Harder economic times are a-catching up with Ruthin—but it isn't all bad news.

This September, we see significant changes to the occupants of The Square. This follows a rather 'gappy' summer, during which time no fewer than a record seven premises have been empty: Barclay's; Alton Murphy; OriGen; the Myddelton Grill; Yellow Moon Florists; Bar Llaeth; and, latterly, State of Distress.

State of Distress closed on August 31st, as the business moved entirely online. This is a bit of a blow for the Square and town, as not only did State of Distress occupy large premises, its colourful & vibrant character and its eclectic stock was of special interest to visitors.

It seems footfall is cited as the reason for the closure. Some report that this is down by as much as a quarter. This makes paying overheads somewhat difficult.

In more positive news, progressively from September, the owner of State of Distress is nevertheless reportedly taking over from the DVSC in the running of the Market Hall. It has to be said that the DVSC's involvement in the Market Hall was a legacy of a previous chief executive and it no longer sits comfortably with the way the current organisation is positioning itself. As a result of the change, we're promised a more vivacious offer and will have to wait and see what this is & how this develops. State of Distress achieved much with its Artisan Markets, which continue, so there's some cause for optimism. Meanwhile, adjacent to the Market Hall, the Registrars have moved into County Hall, leaving the Town Hall all but empty.

One Market Hall stall-holder is likely to be Yellow Moon florists. They moved out of the former Montecito premises this summer.

The closed OriGen occupying the former Vanity Fayre building is newly taken over by Kaffeehaus No. 9, formerly on Clwyd Street, itself now temporarily closed. Rachel's will move from the market to no. 9.

Empty Bar Llaeth will shortly become Naturally Ethical who, from premises on Well Street, offer something very different in town.

While Kaffeehaus No. 9 and Naturally Ethical are welcome additions to the Square, Naturally Ethical leaves behind premises on Well Streets which will remain empty for now.

The former Alton Murphy building has been tastefully refurbished. Though empty, it at least has intriguing and unique window art that lends itself an air of occupancy.

With occupiers about to take over the former Barclay's Bank, the tally on the Square is a reduction from seven to four 'empties' but with a closure on Well Streets.

Meanwhile, Bondhi Furnishings in the Well Street arcade is also closing and, after many years, so it seems is Threads, Clwyd Street.

■ reSource and Barclay's, page 8



22 for 2022

Old favourites combine with rarely seen buildings in the return of Open Doors in 2022

For the first time since 2019, the Civic Association is facilitating the opening of doors, available in the flesh, so to speak. People may visit all the buildings which are open over the weekend of September 10th and 11th 2022. Note that some open only on Saturday. In fact, there are 22 buildings open for 2022. That's 15 per cent of all the buildings and sites advertised by Cadw at the time of writing this September as open in Wales.

The Mayor of Ruthin Cllr Menna Jones will open the proceedings at 10am on



Rose Cottage

Saturday September 10th outside The Old Courthouse on St Peter's Square. Also that morning, the bells of St Peter's will be rung by the local band of volunteers to celebrate Open Doors weekend.

A few of the buildings have never been open before, including The Naylor Leyland Centre in Well Street, the Market Hall in Market Street and St Hychan's Church in Llanychan to the north of

Ruthin. Of note in Ruthin is the recently refurbished Clwyd Bank, Clwyd Street.

Others haven't been open for several years, including The Star in Clwyd Street, Bathafarn Chapel in Market Street and Rose Cottage on the outskirts of the town.

Some are old favourites, like Ruthin Craft Centre, Ruthin Castle, St Peter's Church and the Wayfarer Wool shop. The Archive will open on Sunday 11am to 3.30pm. The Old Gaol will be open but this is still likely to be for outside viewing only, thanks to the amount of work on the listed building's basements after the 2021 floods.

Ruthin Castle is currently undergoing some re-consolidation work on the Mediæval gatehouse and there will be a chance to look at this from the exterior.

There will be another opportunity to visit the Masonic Hall situated in the Mediæval Cloister building behind St Peter's Church, as well as a chance to see the now complete Wynnstay House. Both of these had proven to be extremely popular in 2019.

The full list of buildings is available at ruthincivic.org/opendoors.

The Civic Association acknowledges with gratitude funding for Open Doors from Ruthin Town Council and thanks co-ordinator, Fiona Gale, and business & property owners for their contribution to the weekend.

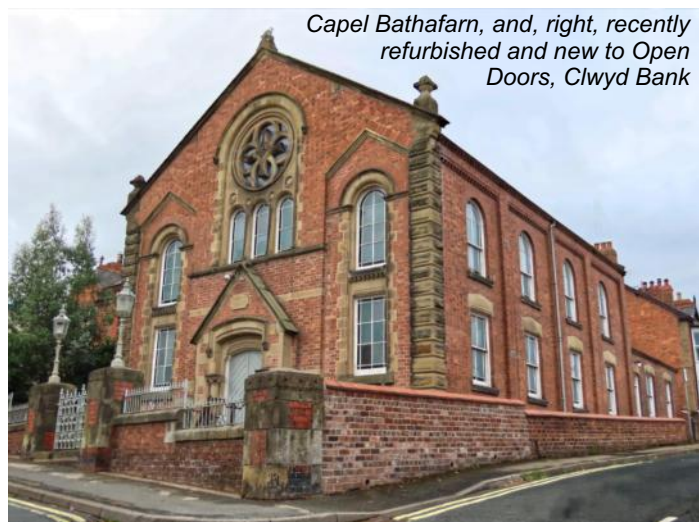
■ Derek Jones, p8



Don't forget that two weeks later (24th & 25th) you can explore Denbigh's Open Doors 2022



Details of Ruthin's Open Doors 2022 and a copy of the leaflet are at ruthincivic.org/opendoors



Capel Bathafarn, and, right, recently refurbished and new to Open Doors, Clwyd Bank



The Ruthin Dating Old Houses Project

Due for imminent publication this autumn is a report on Ruthin's dendrochronology project. This follows the survey of some 15 buildings in town. Here, as a taster we consider what the report is likely to say about one house

The owners of 21 Well Street had always assumed the building was late 16th century with a more modern façade. The 2022 dendrochronology project is likely to place this earlier than expected, probably before 1550. The town will soon know an exact date, because wood for building was used immediately or within a year of felling. Thus the dendrochronological core sample will give an accurate date.

In the mean time, the expert taking the sample core was able to give a fairly accurate idea about the house, thanks to a major clue. The wood within was felled and then cut before the common practice of using a saw pit. Saw pits used for cutting wood into planks or sawn trunks

used one cutter above and the other in a put below the tree. This practice spread rapidly after 1550 but the way the builder cut the timber at 21 Well Street pre-dates this innovation. It is therefore fair to assume that the house pre-dates 1550.

Another interesting feature of the house was its smoke management. Houses of this age were traditionally built to a 'hall' model, with a single large room heated by a fire, with smoke leaving through a hole in the roof. Larger houses would have a partitioned area at one end, to produce a single separate room downstairs (parlour) and a single bedroom (chamber) above it. These



provided some privacy for the master and mistress of the house: everyone else lived communally. No 21 consists of two bays plus an unusual narrow bay (it is possible that there was a third bay beyond this, now a portion of No 23). Smoke blackening in the roof space suggests that this narrow bay was a 'smoke bay'. This was a sixteenth-century innovation, an intermediate stage before the emergence of chimneys; it provided additional spaces that were more private and less smoky, not just a single parlour with chamber above. There are few surviving examples of such a layout. It suggests that the house may originally have been built

with a whole upper floor (rather than having it added later, as happened when hall houses were modernised). If No. 21 is as old as expected, it will likely have been something of a pioneering build, using what at the time were the latest techniques. If correct, this suggests the status of both the builder and the occupier. The chamfer and cut of the beams within confirm that the occupier would have held a relatively high status.

Keeping Ruthin in Bloom this Fine Summer

In themselves, this year's town floral displays have been just as good as in previous seasons. The summer certainly has been exceptional, though.

We'll all remember summer 2022 as being hot and dry, with temperatures up to 99°F in July and 88°F in August. This has posed something of a problem for the contractor hired by the Town Council to water the displays. Thanks to the efforts

of Jeff Brimble, however, the blooms have all stayed fresh, healthy and bright.

The Town Council wherever possible aims to support the local and regional economy and foster social responsibility. This year's floral displays have specifically helped young adults with special educational needs & disabilities at Derwen College, near Oswestry. Students and staff recently visited the



Mayor and Deputy Mayor for tea and bara brith, plus a tour of the displays to see their handiwork. Jeff came along to show them how he watered and took care of the hanging baskets.

Jeff also features in the press cutting in '30 Years Ago' on p9. He's pictured in the centre while helping with the dig.

Castle Timeline

This season, the Ruthin Castle has added a 'timeline' along the corridor which links its reception and Tafarn y Ddraig.

For guests, this adds to the feel of the place and its sense of history. It shows nationally and internationally significant events such as the Magna Carta and Wars of the Roses alongside developments at the Castle itself. It's well presented but we're sorry to report that you do need to ignore the odd typo (not that Town and Around is immune to such glitches). Interestingly, one such major event was the introduction in 1568 of bottled beer!

Later in the timeline are documents and pictures associated with the Castle. It complements that online at ruthincastle.co.uk/home/history/



Concerns Voiced Over Development of the Former Rhos Street School

In the June Town and Around, we reported on a pre-consultation application on the former Rhos Street site.

The Civic Association was one of only seven responses to the pre-planning consultation. We expressed our concerns at the likely demolition of the 19th century school building.

On June 24th, a valid detailed planning application was registered with Denbighshire County Council for housing development, based on details outlined in the last edition of Town and Around. From the raft of documents this contained, it appeared that the developer had taken very little notice of any of the pre-consultation consultation responses.

Early in July, a local architectural historian, Greg Stevenson, voiced his concerns on social media about the proposal. He had worked in building conservation for over twenty years, written a book and featured on programmes about Welsh houses, as well as being a trustee of the Welsh Historic Buildings Preservation Trust.

He asked people to help save Ruthin's heritage. He made the point that 'Many people assume this important part of our town heritage is listed'. Of course, as readers of Town and Around will know, it is not. Neither is it within the town's conservation area.

As a result of his plea, well over 170 people made comments. Many were concerned about the demolition of the

historic school and stated the need to retain at least some of it: perhaps the façade or the building re-used as accommodation for elderly people or for another community use. Other points raised included access issues, increased traffic and parking problems and also the poor design/layout of the proposed housing scheme, especially that the proposed development would be totally out of character with the area in which the school sits. In fact, the school building design is integral to this part of Rhos Street. Certainly the proposal has sparked off a lot of public interest and debate about what should happen on this former school site.

A number of organisations have also submitted comments with their concerns. These include Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust, The Victorian Society, Ruthin Town Council and, of course, the Civic Association. Welsh Government, as highway authority for the A494 trunk road, has now (letter dated 2 August) directed that planning permission be not granted as things stand, as the applicant has provided insufficient information to determine the application.

With additional highway information now required it is not clear whether the planning application will be considered at the next DCC Planning Committee on September 7th. We may have to wait longer before the application comes before County Councillors to make their decision on this prominent site on one of the main transport routes into Ruthin.



Case for an Extension?

Given the character of the road from the old Anchor Inn as far as Ruthin School, the 19th century Rhos Street school, the characterful cottages on both sides of the

road of similar stone, Capel y Rhos, Rose Cottage itself and the 1950s frontage of Ysgol Brynhyfryd, perhaps there is a case for trying to extend the town's conservation area eastwards as far as the town boundary.

Other Redundant Sites

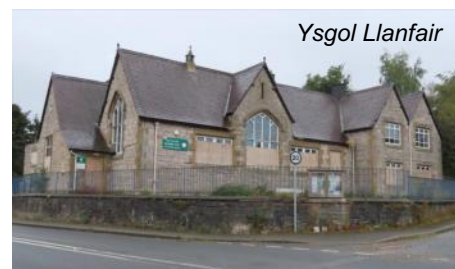
Alongside all the promise, excitement and educational potential of buildings fit for 21st century education comes the responsibility and burden of knowing what to do with those sites declared as surplus.

There remains much merit and value in the pioneering design & work undertaken usually more than a century ago by our council's predecessors.



Groves High, central Wrexham

There can be no more problematic an example locally than at the former Groves School in Wrexham. Closed in 2003, there was a sustained legal campaign to halt the proposed demolition. In 2016, campaigners succeeded in having the buildings spot listed. 20 years after closure, the site nevertheless remains fenced off and boarded up.



Ysgol Llanfair

Locally, alongside Rhos Street closed in 2018, the former Rhewl village school closed the same year and is similarly without a use. Two years later and there remains the prominently-positioned Ysgol Llanfair DC, also currently boarded up.

The less architecturally appealing Ysgol Clocaenog closed in 2014 and remains empty. Education at Ysgol Cyffylliog finished at the same time when the schools merged but we understand there is a use for the Cyffylliog building.

There is also better news as regards the smaller school in Llanfihangel, closed in 1995 and now a private dwelling. Finally, we are reminded that Ysgol Brynhyfryd's lodge is also without a use.

Following a period when this deteriorated badly, we alerted the school to its condition and work began in 2020 on tidying it up.

Since then, it has deteriorated further and we've again brought this to the attention of the school. Remedial work is promised. But, without the possibility of a sustained use the prospects for the Lodge are much reduced.

Civic Association Ruthin Railway Crane Project Update

Much of the work as regards the Railway and Crane project is now complete, writes Fiona Gale

Last autumn, the Ruthin and District Civic Association successfully applied to the Lottery '15 Minute Heritage' pot for funding to refurbish the Railway Crane that sits in the grounds of Ruthin Craft Centre.

Work began on the Crane in May 2022 when local Phyll MacCarter did a great job in sanding down the mechanism and repainting it. You may have noticed the bright red beam, ensuring that no one now ignores the structure. This part of the project was greatly helped by sponsorship from Jones Brothers Ltd of Ruthin.

railway was closed, everything was abandoned. The impressive station building was quite quickly removed and replaced by the Old Station Yard roundabout, while the goods yard was redeveloped as the Ruthin Craft Centre, which opened in 1982. At this point the Crane was lying abandoned on the ground but luckily was taken into storage and safety by officers of the then Clwyd County Council, ready for



Packed out: talk by Fiona Gale in June



The Crane was part of the goods yard at Ruthin Station and was originally sited on the other side of the Craft Centre car park, near where the buses & coaches now park. The crane was made in Warrington by the company Richard Kitchen, and very likely was delivered to Ruthin by rail. When in the 1960s the

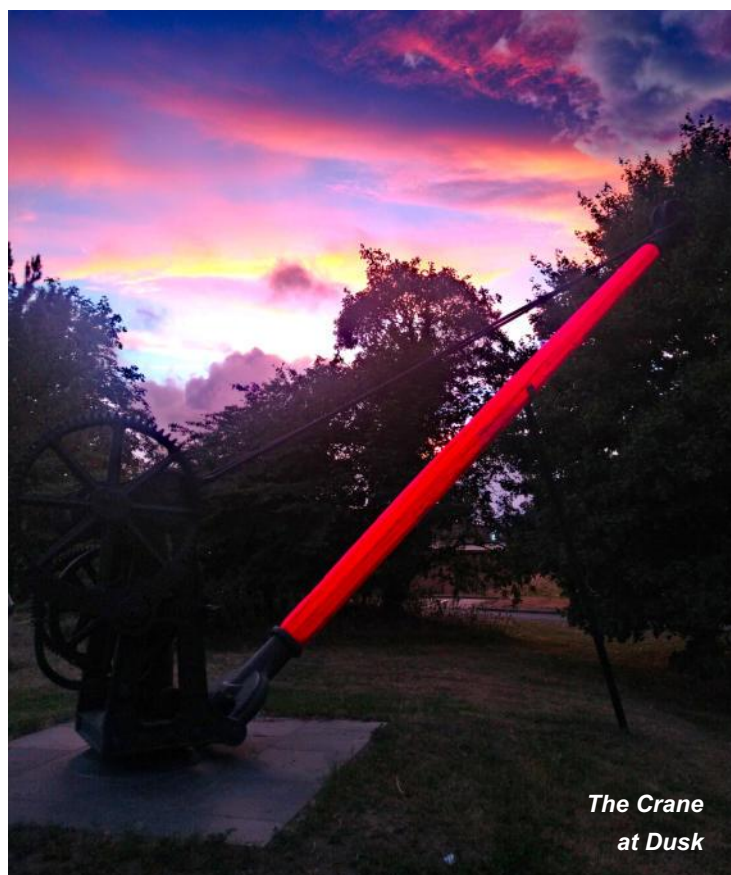
it to be re-erected once the Craft Centre was built.

The work on the Crane has led to a great deal of interest in the railway that used to serve Ruthin. For four weeks over June and July there was an exhibition in The Old Courthouse that told the story of the development and demise of the railway. At least 380 people visited the exhibition and much of the content, particularly the images, came from people living locally. The exhibition will also be on display in part of the Ruthin Craft Centre for Open Doors over the weekend of September 10th and 11th 2022. In June, as part of Gŵyl Rhuthun, three talks were given about the railway and crane in The Old Courthouse, attended in total by over 70 people and following on

from this three other groups in the area want to hear about the Railway, so word is spreading.

While the exhibition was taking place some people noted down their memories in a book kept with the exhibition. This led to a further funding application by the Civic Association to the Clocaenog windfarm pot of money, with the aim that a digital 'Book of You' could be put together for the railway. This will gather memories and stories which will be kept safely and accessibly on line for people to enjoy into the future. This application was also successful and the work on the 'Book of You' will begin in the autumn.

For many years now the Ruthin Railway Crane had become a forgotten part of the town's heritage, looking a bit sad and neglected. Now with a distinct facelift and lots of linked activities, there is much more awareness of the railway and what is left of it on which the Civic Association can build. Thanks must go not only to the Lottery for funding but also Jones Brothers, the Town Council and Denbighshire Leisure who have all so generously helped, and now the Clocaenog windfarm fund as well. It is heartening to see such commitment to Ruthin's heritage.



The Crane at Dusk

The railway was due to pass near the Park Place, to be the railway hotel. See Trevor Hughes article opposite



Dr Trevor Hughes Reflects on the Railway in Ruthin Part 1

by Heather Williams

In 1967, Dr Trevor Hughes (1895-1991) the local GP published a book 'Ruthin: a Town with a Past'. In this fascinating book (which I discovered in a second hand bookshop in Rhos of Sea), he gives many anecdotes about people and places in Ruthin going back as far as his father's memories which date from the mid-1800s.

In this book, Dr Hughes states how the route of the railway from Denbigh to Ruthin (which opened on St David's Day in 1862), had to be negotiated with the landed gentry, which resulted in a diversion of the original route planned. He wondered if the description by Stanley J Weyman (a very popular writer of historical romance, who lived at Plas Llanrhydd on the outskirts of Ruthin) of the 'Valley Railroad' project in his novel 'Ovington's Bank' was a reflection of what took place locally in those not too far off days!

Instead of the railway passing through Park Road where the Railway Station was intended to go (Park Place was to be the railway hotel connected with the Station), the route was changed in a more easterly direction along what is now known as Lôn Parcwr, with the

station being located in the area which is now the roundabout by the Craft Centre.

The line from Ruthin towards Corwen, included a cutting which was bounded on one side by Railway Terrace, and on the other by the new Station Road leading from Well Street to the Station. This cutting extended almost as far as Lodge Goch, and the railway was shielded from view as far as Cae Gwynach by a plantation of Douglas Firs and Birch trees.

Trevor Hughes makes reference to the visit in 1899 to Ruthin Castle of the prince of Wales to stay over for the Chester Races. He was met at the Railway Station by Trevor

Hughes's father, Dr J Medwyn Hughes as Mayor, aldermen and councillors of the Borough of Ruthin. Colonel West (of Ruthin Castle) presented the Mayor and

Mayoress (of Ruthin), the Mayor of Denbigh and other local notabilities to the prince.

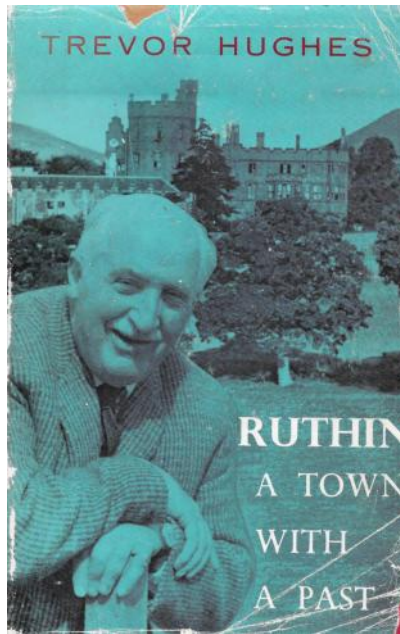
Writing the book just after the railway line had been closed, Dr Hughes comments that 'Sixty years ago, a train used to depart from Euston at midday (week days), change at Chester and arrived at Ruthin at 5.15 on the tick. We have never had it so good... since'. I think some residents in Ruthin would still agree with that comment.

He also noted that 'With its passing goes a sentimental bond which will be lasting to most of us. Ruthin, in common with every other railway station, has been the scene of many dramatic and emotional departures and home-comings, such as the departure of the local volunteers to the Boer War, of the Territorials in World War I and the men and women in the forces in World War II.'

Trevor Hughes also says that 'Many of us will remember several prominent characters, station masters, guards and signalmen, and the rest, indisputably the personification of a magnificent railway system operating throughout the country.' Unfortunately, he didn't include any details of them in the chapter entitled 'Some well-known old characters'

With this dearth of information I have tried to discover a bit more about the former people associated with the railway, some of whom may still have their descendants living in the area and this will form Part 2 of this article.

To be continued...



An Honest View

Though we didn't know it at the time, 2021 was something of a bumper visitor year. In 2022, we assume people have begun to revert to the previous habit of seeking sun abroad, not that there was any shortage hereabouts this year. There were nevertheless still tourists who came to Ruthin and feedback from The Old Courthouse continued to be positive. Among them were separate guests of ours: a long-standing family friend from Cornwall who last visited in 1988 and who remembered little of our town; and an ex-pat whose family moved south 40 years ago for work in Essex.

Both Essex Girl and Cornishman thought that the range of services still available in town was excellent. As you might expect from a critical ex-pat who's returned north, Essex Girl felt that too many of the town buildings needed something of a tidy up. Faded and flaked paint or in some cases weeds left an uncaring air. Then again, her reference point was a very wealthy coastal Essex, the sort of place where even modest semis display a brace of trophy Mercedeses on the drive. Contrast that with Essex's cities of Chelmsford, Southend and Colchester, though, all of which were disease ridden with empties, thanks to the changing structure of the economy and which were suffering much more

than Ruthin, she said.

Cornishman is very travelled. So far this season, he'd visited or was planning on visiting Bristol, Calderdale, Exeter, Builth Wells, Gloucester and possibly Bath and over the years has banked a wealth of experience of towns across the UK. His interest and experience is in heritage and the built environment. As a stranger to Ruthin, his impression was much the more positive.

Ruthin had managed to retain many of the services simply no longer available in even larger towns. As such, Cornishman felt that Ruthin was 20 years behind the times but not in a dated sort of way. It had bucked the trend. He feared that evidence from his travels would suggest that time would eventually catch up with Ruthin. The town to him was 'realistic' with a 'comfortable appearance' and homely appeal, a little different to Essex Girl's view. He felt that Ruthin was 'rather

agreeable' in a slightly understated sort of way. Above all, Ruthin reminded Cornishman of Shaftesbury, a 'lived in' town upon a hill, with fine cascading streets each with impressive views, facing the world confidently. With all the tourist revenue Cornwall can muster, his conclusion was that Ruthin appeared much the more prosperous compared to anywhere in Cernyw. The Old Courthouse project was very much to be commended, he felt.



Opening More Doors

DEREK JONES suggests that now is a time not only to 'act local' but also to 'think global'

Doors are opening again in Ruthin, one of the pioneers of a movement to extend democracy to architecture, old and new. Each year, until the pandemic raised its ugly head, the Civic Association has added new open doors which had previously been closed to its tally of places which had previously been unavailable. Good for the Civic Association for maintaining and keeping up the momentum!

Life is not all roses, however. On its own, such a passion for our place can lead to an inward-looking, parochialism, as if Ruthin was the only place in the world. It is, of course, true that 'there's no place like home', but it is equally true that there are places not too far from Ruthin, where people have no home to go to, and some, further away, whose homes have been deliberately destroyed. So far as the latter is concerned I refer, of course, to the people of Ukraine whose 'heritage', such as it was, has in recent months

been bombed out of existence.

It's not of course that from a distance that many of the bombed blocks and individual houses were in any conventional sense 'beautiful'; many bore the marks of an industrial revolution which was still in progress. But for those who lived in them, it was 'home'. Indeed, for the moment, they were their 'heritage'. As Ruthin celebrated its 'heritage', it is surely appropriate for us bear in mind those whose doors have been forcibly 'opened'.

Ukraine's cities are, of course, not alone in being wrecked by the ravages of war. The world is littered with them. Consider, for instance, Aleppo, Syria, where no less than 30,000 buildings have been destroyed in the civil war. 4,000 years old, the home of generations of civilisations, many of its ancient mansions, alleyways and covered souks have been flattened. The citizens of Ruthin might have more than a fellow feeling for Aleppo, which was previously considered one of the best conservation areas in the world, packed full of UNESCO World Heritage sites.

It should also be noted that not all urban destruction is the consequence of warfare. Some of it has been carried out officially by

governments, national and local. I don't expect many of us have visited Beijing, the capital of China (I haven't, but I have read about the sweeping away, in the name of modernisation of what used to be called 'the city of heavenly tranquillity') In the name of 'modernisations, the handsome courtyards of old Beijing have been swept away to be replaced by the ugliest imaginable tower blocks.

Talking of tower blocks, I wonder if any readers of Town and Around have visited Greenwich recently. The view across the Thames, painted by Canaletto, was one of the most beautiful sites in any European city. Now it is disfigured on its north side by some of the most atrocious tower blocks, worthy indeed of 'modern' Beijing!

I wonder if the Ruthin and District Civic Association might find the time (and space in Town and Around) to draw attention to this kind of urban vandalism. Llangollen has its International Eistedfodd. Might Ruthin devise its own way of thinking globally as well as keeping the flag flying for local heritage. Ideas for opening international doors welcome!

Exmewe Hall to See Use After Barclay's

In the December 2021 edition, we featured reSource and their plans for the former Barclay's Bank building. Here's an update from Janine Cusworth on a productive use of a once empty heritage building

We are delighted to have the keys to our new store.

It's exciting to think that we are tenants of this beautiful property after Barclay's Bank occupied this space for almost 100 years.

We will be making the building accessible with a temporary ramp asap.

We have now moved our main shop fittings in that have all been re-purposed from other sources and will be up-cycling these. Up-cycling processes something to make it better than the original.

The main shop space will be for our creative reuse scrap store, including a separate area for textiles. We will also have our £5 'fill a bucket', where people can obtain low cost creative craft supplies that have been rescued from

landfill and donated from eco-conscious local companies and organisations.

The ground floor also has a separate meeting room that will be available to hire for a range of purposes for £10 per hour.

We are excited to invite local artists/makers to the space, to display and sell their work for an affordable commission rate.

Upstairs, we will host co-working in partnership with a business called Town Square, with the vault/basement area to be renovated as a space for Ruthin Men's Shed and fixing/makers work.

We have a few local organisations and businesses that regularly donate to us and now we have our shop space we wish to scale up this work to support businesses in improving their eco- and community-credentials, reducing waste and putting items into community reuse. We can make use of a large number of items if you have offcuts, seasonal items, shop displays, misshaped/misprinted/ items, and any 'waste' product that is dry/clean/non toxic: please get in touch and you will be surprised at what we can use.



We are delighted with the response to our initial move and there is a lot of interest around this community space. We welcome anyone who is interested in becoming involved in the space as a volunteer, artist/maker, requiring space for a group to meet or just to ask any more general questions. Please contact janine@resourcewales.com

We hope to have our shop open around mid-September but welcome any help/interest in our community shop.



Bull to Bear Housing Market

We were tickled to receive in the post 'The Market Update for High-value Homes in Denbighshire Quarter 2 2022'. This from an unknown-to-us estate agent seemingly based in a probably less-than-high-value industrial shed in Greenfield, near Holywell, or so the postal address implied.

The puff was six pages of market analysis and persuasive copy aimed at attracting us to put our house on the market, right here, right now, before it was all too late.

The reason we were amused was because it seemed among their own general fact-finding, they hadn't done their own research on us that well: it appears that they had (wrongly) assumed that because our house has a name not a number ours was somehow 'unique' and therefore 'high value'.

Mind you, as befits a seller of unique homes, the blurbs for all 17 of their properties at the time on their website were rather unique, as well. We particularly liked the barn conversion 'with a big personality'; the dwelling that was a 'bubble of blissful calm'; and there 'amidst village life' we find 'a quintessential bungalow coddled by its colourful gardens'. All very literary but what is a 'quintessential bungalow' when it's at home?

Back to the six-page 'Market Update for High-value Homes in Denbighshire' addressed to us as 'Dear neighbour'. Quarter 1 apparently saw the biggest rise in property asking prices in 18 years.

The cause? Twice as many buyers as sellers. Vendors were taking advantage of the 'crazy market conditions by selling their homes at the perceived market peak'.

In Q1, 22 per cent of homes appeared to sell in a week and 47 per cent in a fortnight. This was twice as fast as 2019. In fact, since May 2020, when we were allowed into homes again to view, 'the property market has been on

fire'.

Is the Property Market in Denbighshire Softening?

The newsletter then posed this very question. It's still a sellers market, with the 'property stock' at only 39 per cent of 2019 levels. Q2 and Q3 will see stock levels increase dramatically, they said. Sellers who to date were put off because there wasn't enough high end choice for onward purchase will 'finally commit', creating more choice and resulting in a buyers' market.

This apparently means there will be 'a lot more homes to choose from'.

And here it is: 'But remember, you'll need to react quickly to be in a position to take advantage of the situation'. The window between bull and bear is remarkably small before it closes and there'll be more choice but no one to buy.

The conclusion in the view of this agent was, first, there'll be a clear rise in the number of properties being marketed; and, secondly, some economic challenges have yet to impact the market but they will do in the next three to six months. So, basically, if you want to sell, get your skates on.

And What's Actually Happening in Ruthin?

• Trend 1. At the end of July, we had 24 properties on the market in Ruthin. This wasn't a huge choice but it was

certainly an improvement.

• Trend 2. Of the 24, five had been reduced in price. That is now a significant proportion, at 20 per cent.

• Trend 3. July was a big month to see houses added to the market. 22 went on and six (27 per cent) of these were sold subject to contract. Compare this to June, when just seven were marketed for the first time, four (57 per cent) of which are sold subject to contract. Also in June, a further four were reduced, one having been sold. The market was much smaller in June but half had SSTC.

Towards the end of their market update, the writers of the newsletter did consider the global impact of world events, inflation and sanctions. These they said would impact 'lower and middle markets' but, presumably, less so their 'unique' sector. It was at least comforting to note that they suggested that the Will Smith v Chris Rock Oscars 'slap' story 'won't have an impact on the Denbighshire property market'.

Phew, that's OK, then.



In the June 2022 edition, we featured The Times' 'Best Places to Live' guide which included Ruthin in Wales' top six. Williams Estates has cottoned on to Best Places to Live and for the unique property Plas Gwyn says of Bryn Goodman, 'It has the feel of a country lane a few yards from the town centre'

30 Years Ago

30 years ago this year and against the clock archaeologist Edmund Waddelove from Castle Park was finishing his 'desperate attempt' to salvage what he could of the Romano-British site on the Parc Brynhyfryd housing construction site.

Reports in 1992 in both the Vale Advertiser and Denbighshire Free Press highlight Waddelove's struggles, following three years of digging. It culminated in experts from Manchester University visiting the site in 1992, who verified the site as first century Roman.

In 1992, according to the local press, Waddelove discovered what he believed was a Roman gateway beneath the topsoil at the rear of the Parc Brynhyfryd site. 1992 was also the year that Waddelove felt he had found more

evidence that the site was a military fort, possibly a transitory one, to add to the evidence of three years earlier of what he thought was a Roman barrack block. But the Clwyd Powys

Archaeological trust did not agree with Waddelove. This was because of a general lack of pottery on the site, even though Waddelove unearthed some fragments.

Waddelove contended that the lack of artefacts was actually indirect proof of a military settlement: soldiers rarely carried breakable pots.

Speaking to the press in 1992, Waddelove said, 'A Roman Room is a distinct possibility at Nant Clwyd House... should it become a museum. If so, the mountains of discoveries we have collected can be displayed there'.

What remains of this 'mountain' is likely held boxed up unseen in Chester. Please may we have these back sometime?



Putting Their Stamp on Ruthin and the World

Optimistic news that Plas Coch, the former Conservative Club, could pass to a local Lôn Parcwr business sent Peter Daniels investigating

The closure in August 2021 of the Conservative Club left the town with a problem. Here was a listed heritage building likely to remain empty. Not only that, it was one of mediæval origin. Cadw states that Plas Coch was 'listed for its special interest as a large early 17th century town-house, unusual for its stone construction in this area, which was built

But, there's more to this story.

Tucked away on Lôn Parcwr between Pine & Oak Direct and The Bakehouse, Lavinia Stamps is a specialist business unlikely to be known to more than a few of us in Ruthin. Importantly, however, it has both a national and global reach and reputation. It attracts people to its Ruthin premises from all over Britain and indeed the world. Lavinia Stamps is a leader in its field: the design, manufacture and sale to both the public & trade of polymer-based stamps for craft creatives to use, in card or picture design. All of their

stamps are designed in-house and manufactured in the UK. It also sends its products all over the world.

Alongside its polymer-based stamps, its Lôn Parcwr retail unit also sells other craft-based products and stocks gifts in support of small businesses similar to its own, knowing how important it is to support fellow independent traders. Among the range available are products from Ruthin-based Bathing Beauties.

People come from all over to visit its retail premises (open Monday to Saturday)



and the distances involved mean some have to stay overnight, feeding into the local hospitality economy. Others come for Lavinia Stamps' popular two-day workshops and they, too, stay over. Imagine these day or overnight visitors, rather than arriving at Lôn Parcwr, finding themselves in our town centre. The benefits are obvious. Not only that, Lavinia Stamps already encourages people to visit and explore the town, whether directly to those who turn up or via their social media channels.

The conversion and use of Plas Coch isn't going to be instant. Even if and when permission to change its use is granted, there's still much to do and even some uncertainty, but we do appear now to be on the first steps to a sustainable use that will safeguard the future for Plas Coch.



for a high-status owner, and which retains its character and detail.' Cadw further says that it was rebuilt in and is formerly dated to 1613, for the Constable of Castell Coch, using red sandstone from the castle.

Owners the Conservative Association originally wished to let the building but the work required to modernise and alter the interior from a club was off-putting. In January 2022, the building went up for sale, with an asking price of £550,000.

And this is where Ruthin business Lavinia Stamps stepped in.

In March 2022, they made an offer to buy the building, subject to planning permission for a change of use. That change is from a private members' club to a mixed retail site with gallery and workshops. Comments on that change officially closed in July 2022.

The Civic Association as an interested body has written in support, as we would rather see the building occupied (although obviously not at any price). Lavinia Stamps' plans seem imaginative and consistent with a building of this importance.

If permission is granted, then there will begin the drafting of further plans and permissions for the conversion of the property to accommodate a retail area and gallery on the ground floor and craft workshop and artists' design studio above requiring the installation of a lift.

Hiding in plain sight?

Lavinia Stamps is a business that might not be so well known locally but it has a reputation across the world.

They currently trade with 32 countries and had a reach of 57 million in the last year on Facebook. With over 31,500 subscribers to its YouTube channel and 135,000 views per month, it takes its online presence as seriously as its design and manufacturing.

Its online business boomed during the coronavirus health emergency. People who otherwise might have been stuck inside climbing the walls turned to craft, such as Lavinia's stamps. Lavinia Stamps still produces one new online demonstration video per day and some even feature the owner's son, to show that crafting can even be for the least experienced. They warmly recall the positive messages they received from people who otherwise were struggling through the succession of worldwide lockdowns.



The business was actually started in 1992 in the Craft Centre by Tracey and Kev Dutton. People may remember at the time they were making ceramics. About 17 years ago, the owners started to experiment with stamps made of clay and the business developed from there. Upon the demolition of the former Craft Centre, they moved first to one and then two

log cabins in their garden, before relocating to Lôn Parcwr, where it occupies a Tardis-like shop with an office, studio and design space behind. A separate unit next door but one serves the trade.

The business employs 15 people

directly and an outsourced design team of 12.

All this activity is going on under our very noses. This is a business of which Ruthin can be proud.

Moving to the town centre will allow its light to shine brightly locally.

Ruthin and District Civic Association

Annual Report 2021/22

For what were obvious reasons, the Civic Association's September 2021 to August 2022 year started slowly but since then has been much more active than in the previous couple of years. The Committee has at last been able to meet in person, for example, and we have also felt confident to plan for this month's heritage Open Doors event, the first since September 2019. On that note, may I express my thanks to Fiona Gale who this year has co-ordinated the event and to the sub-committee of Anne Roberts, Kathy Daniels and Heather Williams. May I again thank the Town Council for its support and grant towards the event. This year, rather than using the Library as previously, the hub for the event will fittingly transfer to The Old Courthouse.

It cannot have escaped members' notice that the Craft Centre Railway Crane is now restored. It looks splendid. This, of course, was a project undertaken on the Civic Association's behalf principally by Fiona Gale and Rob Price. We thank the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Clocaenog Windfarm Fund, sponsors Jones Bros & Denbighshire Leisure, and the Town Council who have funded the project. The crane refurbishment itself was undertaken by Phyll MacCarter.

It's interesting that the whole project has caught the imagination of people locally. Fiona Gale has organised an exhibition on the railway in Ruthin and this saw over 400 people. An additional

65 plus at least 15 via Zoom saw the her June 2022 talk on the railway.

Interpretation boards for the railway and crane are due by the end of the year.

After some catching up, we have conferred the 2021 Quayle Award on the hospital/new clinic project and I should like to thank those involved, namely Kay Culhane, Menna Jones and Robert Williams.

The Civic Association does have some reservations about some (but only some) of the proposals within the Levelling Up bid. The bid is nevertheless very welcome and we have expressed our wholehearted support for the principals of the project.

In 43,746 words during the Civic Association year, Town and Around continued to be the most tangible part of the Civic Association's work, with its usual mix of interesting and relevant articles, including highways heritage features, foraging, the Peers Memorial, a quarter of a century of Denbighshire County Council, policing, tennis, S4C's 'Codi Pac' visit to Ruthin, traffic in town, 'Agincourt', the Cuning Green, DVSC, the National Park debate, Glasdir housing, the road to Cerrigydrudion, St Peter's drop-in sessions and what was an unexpectedly popular piece on the migratory patterns of *Receptum rubrum*. May I thank all contributors and especially Peter Daniels who willingly co-ordinates the contributions into a well-presented

quarterly publication.

We made various attempts at trying to persuade someone to come forward to consider planning applications but, to date, no one has volunteered. Without such a person, it is impossible for us to keep a watching brief on all local town & country planning applications. That has not stopped us considering major applications. We were one of only seven who responded to the former Rhos Street School site pre-planning consultation and one of over 170 who objected to the plans as they stood. Our concern remains that the proposed housing has an inappropriate 'feel' to it when you consider nearby buildings. We do not want to see the loss of the heritage structure but neither do we wish to see a declining, redundant building in years to come without a sustainable use.

During the year, we also updated our logo (see back page). It's designed to reflect the district encircling the 'R' of Ruthin town.

Finally, may I thank the 2021/22 Committee for their help, support and contributions. They were Anne Roberts (Chair), Heather Williams (Vice-chair), Robert Williams (Hon. Treasurer), Steve Beach, Kay Culhane, Kathy Daniels, Menna Jones, Rob Price and Peter Daniels (Secretary).

**Anne Roberts MBE
Chair, 2021/22**

Membership & Subscription Information for 2022/23

Subscriptions to the Association for the year 2022 to 2023 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 the previous nine years.

Regrettably, our bank HSBC has recently introduced a £5 per month charge on to our account in order, in their words, to provide a better service. In this regard we are in the same position as many other smaller charitable organisations but, despite representations made to HSBC, they refuse to alter their decision. In addition any subscriptions paid to us by cheque will now cost the Civic Association a flat rate of 80p per cheque. If therefore you are able to pay your subscription either by standing order or direct bank transfer then that would be helpful. However we do understand that not all members would wish to do this and therefore we are still more than happy to receive subscriptions by cheque.

Enclosed with this edition of Town & 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 the Civic Association. Please return to the Honorary Treasurer, RADCA, Lenton House, Mold Road, Ruthin, LL15 1SL

Please note that existing members who already pay their subscriptions by standing order will not have received a form.

Bank Details for anyone wishing to pay by bank transfer are as follows:

- Bank: HSBC Ruthin
- Sort Code: 40-39-1
- Account No: 81137514
- Account Name: Ruthin & District Civic Association
- Reference: Please put your surname and postcode

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

Data Protection

The Civic Association keeps a computerised register of all members, including name, address, telephone number(s), email address(es) and method of payment of subscription. We hold these data to manage subscription renewals, post or deliver copies of Town and Around (and where appropriate other material) and to enable us to communicate directly with members. We do not share these data nor do we pass

these on to any third party other than may be required by law. Officers of the Civic Association have access to these data solely to discharge their duties in the management of the Civic Association.

If you would like to see this information, or have it removed from our records and destroyed, then please contact the Treasurer, Robert Williams, Lenton House, Mold Road, Ruthin LL15 1SL Tel Ruthin 704998 or email ruthincivic@btinternet.org

Notice of Annual General Meetings 2022

The Civic Association 2022 AGM will be held at 7 p.m. on October 13th, 2022 at The Old Courthouse. We shall send the minutes of the 2021 AGM as usual by email.

2022 AGM Agenda

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

Seen in Passing...



The occupancy since the second week of July of the first houses on the Clwyd Alyn Glasdir site has brought with it a need to install the first street name plates. These are initially temporary affairs but one, for Stryd y Friallen (Primrose Street), appeared to be a little more transient than the developers expected. As can be seen from the image, someone misspelt the street name, forgetting the mutation 'Friallen' and using 'yr' not 'y'. After the Civic Association made a quick phone call to the County Council's Street Naming Designations Department, all was very quickly corrected.



'Tipping Point' outside the Craft Centre, the wooden sculpture that made it to the final three in the recent Sky Arts 'Landmark' TV series, is now removed and in its place is a suitably avant-garde yet temporary exhibit entitled 'The Four Road Cones of the Acropolis'.



The Civic Association has again been pressing for the reopening of the Cuning Green. There doesn't appear to be much information on progress but vehicles spotted near the collapse are nevertheless a cause for some optimism, we trust.

Late last month, a pair of unusual benches joined the seating on the Square near the Peers Memorial. They are for the

Coffee Cabin and in enhancing the outdoor space are made of wood, some possibly recycled.



The refurbishment of the former Alton Murphy building on The Square brought with it this window display. Ruthin has tried a number of schemes for unoccupied shop units but this is by far the most attractive.



Has Ruthin come up with a novel method to improve British summer time? For about two weeks in July, the clock on the Peers Memorial was actually moving backwards. Just when we got used to getting younger, an engineer resolved the problem. Here's the time at the Peers Memorial and St Peter's clocks when 5½ hours adrift.



Highly commended are a number of properties in town, business and residential, which have enjoyed a paint up this summer, including the former Beresford Adams; 21 Well Street and adjacent; the Well Street arcade; and opposite Finline, Clwyd Street.



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

Town & Around is published quarterly by the Ruthin & District Civic Association. It is available from Ruthin Library 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 18th, 2022

Thanks are due to this quarter's contributors: Janine Cusworth, Peter Daniels, Fiona Gale, Derek Jones, Anne Roberts and Heather Williams; and with the help of Kathy Daniels, Jackie Davies, Kev & Tracey Dutton & team at Lavinia Stamps, James Hall, Menna Jones, Dorinda Kostravenglis, David Smart, Heather Williams, Robert Williams and A S Wood

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

We must make mention of Denbighshire Leisure's Café R three-nights-a-week Tapas evenings over the summer. It was good to see some more choice in the evening food market in town and theirs was reasonably priced and different.



We're used to seeing 'bee friendly' open spaces, thanks to the County Council. In 2022, we noticed Llanbedr Community Council also partaking, on a verge on the A494 by the Smithy.