

Town & Around O Gwmpas y Dre

December 2022



Quarterly comment & features from the Ruthin & District Civic Association

“Hangin’ around. Nothing to do but frown...”

“... Rainy days and Mondays always get me down” (The Carpenters, 1971)

If the number of people visiting The Old Courthouse this spring and summer is representative of visitors to town more generally, then the surprising fact is that Mondays are at least as important and possibly more so than other days of the week.

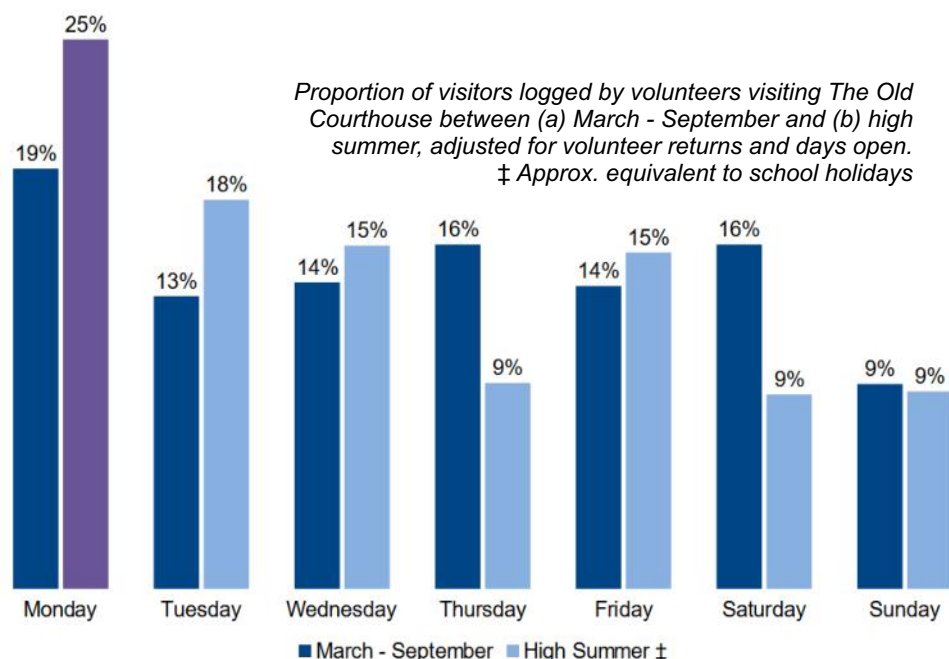
Yet, Monday is the day that visitors may not get the best impression of our town.

The importance of Mondays is one conclusion of an analysis of visitors entering The Old Courthouse hub. Visitors did so to see the building and get information on the town. Over the period between March and the end of

September 2022, volunteers when available have been willing to record (when able) information on visits.

Following 94 days’ worth of data, 916 recorded visits and 1,691 visitors, it would appear that the beginning of the week is more popular than we think, and more so than the week’s end.

This does seem counter-intuitive. The town always feels barer on Mondays but the fact remains that there is a significant proportion of spring & summer visitors on that day. The analysis suggests that at least some of these have been away for a long weekend and have made a Monday call into Ruthin on their way home or elsewhere.



And, over the high summer (approximating to the summer school holidays) the proportion favouring Mondays appears even higher.

Yet, over spring & summer, the town has less to offer visitors on Mondays. Some shops close. The Craft Centre no longer opens on Mondays. Nantclwyd y Dre is closed save for The Lord's Garden. The Old Gaol wasn't open at all last season.

The volunteer returns indicate that visitors were overwhelmingly positive about their visits. There was, however, frustration about Mondays (and later in the week about closed Nantclwyd y Dre). Some had specifically arrived to see one or other of our main attractions, voicing their disappointment at being unable to do so.

■ Gayla House, p7

■ Community-led tourism, p6

Urban Rooms

Taking a long-term and participatory approach to urban planning & development depends upon bringing people together. This is the idea behind Urban Rooms, said Cllr Gavin Harris at October's Civic Association AGM.

An Urban Room is a space to get involved in discussions about a town or an area. The Town Council wishes to join the Urban Rooms network and develop such a space for Ruthin. It's

asked the Civic Association to be a partner.

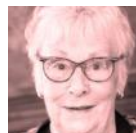
It goes without saying that, over its 35 years, the Civic Association has been active in this area in trying to preserve and enhance the visual appeal of the town, whether that is scrutinising planning applications, commenting on development or organising Open Doors. In terms of the streetscape, so, more recently, has the Town Council: it has at

various times since 2009 offered a number of perspectives on Ruthin's future in reports and participatory sessions.

Much of this overlaps and there is naturally a 'good fit' between the aims and objectives of the Civic Association and that of the Town Council's Ruthin Future vision. The

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View from the Chair



Jewel in the Vale

Although it seems unfashionable now to say so, for many, many years we described Ruthin as 'The Jewel in the Vale'.

'Ruthin is like nowhere else in Wales. It's a surprising little town, layered with centuries of history and set in one of the most beautiful landscapes in Britain'.

This extract is to be found on the Visit Ruthin website. How many times do we read similar pieces in other publications describing our town?

How many times have you heard local people say 'We are so lucky to live here', especially throughout the awful pandemic we have just endured. I would hazard a guess that the answer is many times.

You might wonder why I am asking. The answer is that, although I believe we are all justifiably proud of our lovely town, we do, in my case anyway, tend to take The Jewel in the Vale for granted a lot of the time.

We all want to see our town flourish, businesses succeed and see people travelling to visit, and therefore I think we must all re-think what we do to encourage this, in any way we can, so that Ruthin will thrive and be enhanced once more, and become a vibrant tourist attraction, a town which is attractive to all residents, both young and old, as well as to visitors. A real jewel, in fact.

We know from the collected comments from this year's visitors that virtually everyone coming here shares our sense

of history and heritage. They are delighted with what they find here.

We also know from the same analysis that Mondays feature much more significantly than perhaps we realised. Yet, summer Mondays offer less for visitors.

Not only do we need to promote the wonderful attributes our town has to offer, there is a need to conserve and restore, in some cases, many historic landmarks, a legacy we have inherited, for the benefit of future generations. Ruthin and District Civic Association is nearing completion of the project to restore the railway crane, a project which has attracted a lot of local interest. A bid has been submitted to the the Levelling-up fund for work that will include re-modelling of St. Peter's Square. We are eagerly awaiting the result of this. Two other small groups are involved in work to restore the Peers Memorial on St. Peter's Square and the War Memorial on Wynnstay Road. Ruthin Castle Trust is busy working on the restoration of the old mediæval castle gateway. This is valuable work that will enable these monuments to endure for future generations.

If we want to see our town thrive and the jewel restored, sitting still and doing nothing is no longer an option. It would be good to hear any suggestions you might have, on any of the issues mentioned, or indeed if you are able to assist in any way, either by volunteering or simply by giving us feedback so that we can factor this into any future projects.

Please get in touch. My email address is anne.roberts275@btinternet.com

Anne Roberts MBE
Chair of the Civic Association

Acceptable in a Conservation Area?

Amid all the positive feedback, residents' response and the celebration of an important building back in use comes a concern.

The entrance to Resource's new 'scrap store' at the former Barclay's building was initially plastered in plastic ephemera and banners.

That now appears to have subsided. We do need to be mindful of the spread of plastic banners on our historic buildings and within the town centre conservation area, on the Barclay's building as elsewhere.

We need a debate about the appropriateness of these new features within their surroundings and whether they reflect negatively on the town.

Urban Rooms from p1

idea is that, through Urban Rooms, both can come together and the ideal space is within The Old Courthouse.

Ruthin is currently well ahead of thinking in this area. It is the only Welsh town or city to have joined Urban Rooms. In fact, the possibilities for market towns is thus far under-represented. Country towns need a strong participatory voice.

So, how can the Civic Association and the Town Council help each other? More talks and joint speakers is one possibility. Presenting ideas for the future of town is a second. Partnering in exhibitions and other events is a third. Actively contributing to a permanent display at The Old Courthouse is a fourth.

And one further area is to try to bring in those who are disengaged or discouraged, perhaps because of mis-information circulating through social media.

If Urban Rooms succeeds, it does not mean that we as a Civic Association and the Town Council will agree all the time and this is healthy but it does give us an opportunity to have a clearer voice in the future.

Quayle Award 2021 for Ruthin Hospital and Clinic

For a number of reasons, it's taken some time to assemble the recipients of the 2021 Quayle Award. And, as this photo testifies, the conferment took place on the very week that the Welsh Government again announced the compulsory wearing of face coverings in health settings (from November 14th, 2022). Steven Grayson, Mount Street's Dr Peter Leatt and, right, chairman of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board



Mark Polen OBE receive the Quayle Award 2021 from Civic Association committee member and Mayor of Ruthin, Cllr Menna Jones.

We chose the refurbishment because in our view it has improved

and enriched the site aesthetically thanks to its good design next to retaining of the entrance and foyer to the existing 1904 hospital building. Not least, the Civic Association trusts that the £4m will safeguard the hospital for the future as a modern health hub with the integration of the Mount Street general practice clinic formerly in a substandard building. There are facilities for medical training in the hope trainees will remain loyal, as evidence suggests they tend to be.

The local League of Friends has also helped with funding for a new reception area, tea bar and relatives' room, with an investment of almost £50,000. The tea bar is expected to open this month. Denbighshire County Council gave the community hospital some of its former Rhos Street school site land in return for the Mount Street premises.

Improvements include to therapy services, access to the hospital site on foot and the completion of a new 35 space car park. There are new showers and changing rooms for staff and health employees can now hot-desk if they choose or have to.

■ Runner up was the Market Hall, Market Street. We had reservations about the quality of the refurbishment and in particular the disabled persons' access.

■ The Quayle Award and Anvil Pottery, Llanrhaeadr, p8

More on Traffic and The Square

We eagerly await the results of the Levelling Up Fund bid. There's a lot resting on it: remodelling of the west wing at Nantclwyd y Dre, changes to Cae Ddol and, of course, treatment of The Square.

Since Denbighshire County Council's bid, the world has changed. We can no longer be as optimistic as we once were about the necessary transformational projects. This may be a last chance.

But as a prelude to something, whatever that 'something' may be, we've been taking a look again at cars on The Square. They're everywhere, parked legally, parked unlawfully, cruising, vainly looking for a space but also, of course, just cutting through town for no purpose other than to avoid Park Road and Wernfechan.

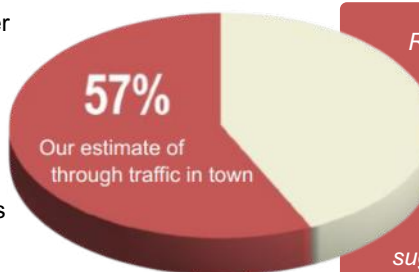
This is in no way scientific but we think that over the summer season between June and mid-October on

average per hour there are between 500 and 600 vehicle movements across the Square on weekday daytimes.

That's as much as peak traffic per hour on the A494 leaving Ruthin.

We already reported that we think that 57 per cent of traffic operates through the town without stopping to shop, load, unload or visit (Town and Around, September 2021).

That's about 320 vehicles per hour that contribute nothing to the local economy add to the unpleasantness for pedestrians and clutter for which the sea of tarmac is provided.



Robin Hill makes an interesting suggestion, below, that could improve the Square and fill some of the currently spare accommodation at County Hall. He suggests moving the Post Office, sorting office & pillar box to County Hall, freeing up the current post office for other things (he suggests a bistro) while allowing the Square to become more 'continental' in feel.

I Had A Dream

Abed last night I slumbered sound,
Dreaming a vision quite profound.
I found myself at Top of Town
Transformed to Ruthin's bejewelled crown.
Young and old all taking ease
Laughing, chatting 'neath shady trees
Savouring a florally scented breeze.

This enthralling, inviting touristic scene
Continental might well have been.
Yet, puzzling, the lack of traffic blight
No metal obstructions through which to fight!
The old PO now stripped of stamps
A bistro with blinds and ornate lamps,
Its agile staff the vital links
To happy folk seeking snacks and drinks,
No kerbs or paraphernalia baulk
The smooth piazza on which they walk.

Also informed through power of dreams
Postal facilities are now it seems
At Market Street Council One Stop Shop,
Pillar box handy by the main Bus Stop.
For post van traffic's diverted flow
Station Road gives ready to and fro
To the Sorting Office found in place
Of home-working officials' vacated space.
Transposition appropriate in point of view
Councillor Hilditch-Roberts aka Postmaster Huw.

And lest concern had spoiled the dream
Loose ends avoided it would seem
With One Stop facilities accessible still
At Record Street Library – as they are at Rhyl.

This visionary dream on a slumberous night
Renewed hope, on waking, of true foresight.

Robin Hill, Ruthin. November 2022



Friday September 30th at 10 am and few pedestrians are around to see the nine minutes of action as this wagon driver (skilfully) negotiates the Square without incident, having approached from Castle Street. Here, he's mounted the pavement by the Peers Memorial. Two manoeuvring cars were involved in a resultant minor collision, though

Cunning Green Update

The wall on the Castle side may this October be repaired but this unfortunately does not mean that we can look forward any time soon to the re-opening of the much-missed Cunning Green.

As revealed in June 2022's Town & Around, The Lord's Garden supporting wall overhanging the Cunning Green is unstable.

Subject to a fuller survey, it is now apparent that work may cost up to £300,000 in order to repair The Lord's Garden's substantial supporting wall.

In the meantime, expect a more permanent diversionary route within the garden to ensure visitors do not stray near the precarious structure.

When The Lord's Garden was opened, there were excavations below the wall's parapet, to ensure that the height of the parapet for visitors was sufficient that no one would be at risk of tripping over. This created a path along the wall's length. This year, part of that path has been losing chippings and a ton of new stone has been used to backfill but still there remains a depression.



War Memorial Project to Begin?

by Rob Price

Nearly a century after it was built, in the next few months, the town's war memorial is set to be restored.

The memorial standing between County Hall and the English Presbyterian Church on Wynnstay Road is one of the gems of the town, with its column, exquisite sculpture and the names of the town's fallen. The memorial is a listed structure by Cadw and is owned and maintained by Ruthin Town Council.

The war memorial's history is quite extraordinary. A June 2018 Town and Around article by Gwynne Morris gives the story, available at ruthincivic.org/publications/town-and-around/archive/

Discussion from 1919 regarding its location, plan, construction and links with other projects at the time were by no means straightforward and it took seven years and last minute delays to install the memorial, dedicated on December 5th, 2025, by Lord Kenyon, the County's Lord Lieutenant.

Most Town and Around readers will be aware of the war memorial and its features, but in case you aren't, the memorial has a central distinctive Celtic-cross style monument constructed of grey concrete resembling unpolished granite which is a tapering pillar surmounted by a wheel-cross decorated with inter-lace work, on a base with curved sides and stepped top moulding. The upper part of the pillar contains a blind arch with ropework surround, bearing a figure in relief, and reading 'St Michael' below. The lower part of the pillar has an inverted dagger in relief, and interlace work.

There is an inscription to each side reading 'To the glory of God and in memory of those from this borough who fell in the war 1914-18, their name liveth forever more'. The base bears the names of the men who died. It is on a low square plinth with rounded corners which has an inscription across the front. The monument is set within an enclosure bound by iron railings to the front and sides, and a curved stone wall to the rear. There is a curved wall to the rear, of snecked red sandstone with square end piers. Set into the wall are three granite



tablets, those to left and right dedicated to those who died in World War II and that to centre is to a soldier who died in the Falklands Campaign, 1982.

Concerns about the memorial's condition have been raised now for several years, including by military veterans in the town, not least one of the town's most revered and well known veterans, the late Mr Bill Fowlie.

Therefore, in 2021, the Town Council formed a working group of councillors and local people to take the project forward and, a little while later, voted for funds to secure the services of a professional conservation architect to survey the structure and draw up a programme of works to restore the memorial.

The findings were interesting but also concerning. It highlighted some major issues, such as the wall next to the memorial reclining, green growth on the back of the Memorial that could damage the structure, as well as the stones underneath the railings cracking apart (owing to water ingress and freeze thaw effect). Also, that the slate style paving on the floor of the memorial was only

suitable for outdoor not indoor use and that the ink of the names was running which at some point could cause them to become very faint. The plans were put out to consultation as part of the remembrance display in the Old Courthouse during last winter.

Cadw has agreed £25,000 in principle, subject to other funding being available by April 2023, with the works provisionally planned in May or June under the supervision of John Pugh, whose recent work includes the magnificently restored war memorial at Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd.

The War Memorial will be fenced off and out of view for a period of approximately two weeks while the work is carried out. The conservation officer at Denbighshire County Council has already confirmed that no listed building consent process is required since the works are like-for-like and the local branch of the Royal British Legion has also voiced its wholehearted support.

The project will future-proof the Memorial for several decades and give it a proper restoration as a fitting landmark to the town's fallen.

Open Doors Success

September 2022's Open Doors weekend organised by the Civic Association was probably Ruthin's best ever, certainly in recent years.

Coinciding as it did with good weather and the quilting exhibition in town, Ruthin's streets were alive with people visiting various properties not usually open or not generally available since 2019.

So popular were some venues that it was difficult for volunteers and property owners to ensure they accounted for the numbers visiting.

Among the highlights, over the two

days there were at least 450 visitors at Wynnstay House. There were over 500 at St Peter's and at least the same in The Old Courthouse. Rose Cottage saw at least 220 people.

Open on one day only, Clwyd Bank garnered exactly 249 and it was busy all day; The Star pulled in at least 150; and the Naylor Leyland Centre 100.

In all, there were at least 2,600 individual visits and that's without accounting for the properties which have not declared: the Masonic Hall, The Craft Centre's railway exhibition, Ruthin Castle and the refurbished Market Hall.

In all, the numbers will likely be well over 3,000... and some.

We thank all those who willingly opened their doors.



The Star, much older than 1639

Recent Dendrochronology & Survey Project

In Ruthin and now its wider district, writes Fiona Gale & Gareth Evans

You may have read in a recent edition of the Denbighshire Free Press an article about funding which was awarded for a dendrochronology (tree ring dating) pilot project taking place in Ruthin. As a town, Ruthin has more than its fair share of important timber framed buildings, a few of which have already been dated by using dendrochronology.

What is dendrochronology? It's a process by which timbers used in buildings can be dated by comparing the growth rings with known and dated samples. The process of comparing is not done by eye but rather by computer analysis, which compare known and new samples. Historically it had been thought that oak trees in the Vale of Clwyd were very quick growing which led to a small sample of rings in each timber—not enough for comparison but recently that has been shown to not always be the case.

Previously, the Discovering Old Welsh Houses group has successfully dated about five buildings in the town and its outskirts, such as Nantclwyd y dre (1435) and The Old Courthouse (1421).

Early in 2022 a small group came together to talk about how good it would be to build on these few known dates and try to look more closely at the town. It was just an informal idea initially, something it would be great to have but unlikely to be easily achieved. Until suddenly we were made aware of some funding, a community pot linked to the Levelling-up agenda, which was looking for applications. Very hastily a project

was designed to try to date 10 to 15 buildings within the town, to produce detailed plans and sections of their earliest phases and from this to develop an innovative tourism product for the town. An application was sent in to Cadwyn who were managing the process and in the early spring the answer came back that the application had been successful.

Appointing the consultants who were going to undertake the tree ring dating



and the survey was relatively straightforward. Both are people who have worked in Ruthin before.

Considering the tourism output was a bit more complicated but by early summer everyone was in place. All that was left was for us as a small group to knock on doors to find willing building owners who were interested in their building being studied. They shouldn't mind samples being taken from their timbers and surveyors traipsing through to get the information needed for a plan and elevation of the first phase of each building's construction. Thankfully, this wasn't as difficult as we thought and over the summer months the samples were taken and the drawings produced. Reports have been returned on all of these, and the results are proving very

interesting, although at the moment cannot be circulated widely because we need to get permission from all the participants.

Suffice to say that buildings in Castle Street, Well Street, St Peter's Square and Clwyd Street have been looked at and we are beginning to get a better understanding of how the town developed and changed. Actual dates and results will be published soon. Also out very soon will be a out soon will be a leaflet highlighting some of the main points of interest from

the project. The leaflet has just been approved and gone to print. Within is a tour of the town, with 10 buildings which demonstrate key features and dates to look out for, as well as illustrating features typical of timber framed buildings. There will also be a report outlining recommendations as to how the information can be accessed and built on in the future.

Hopefully in the next edition of Town and Around some of the actual information can be published.

And, stop press, we have just heard that there is funding to extend the pilot project into the rural areas around Ruthin, so rather than a quiet winter, we are looking forward to more work taking place, all of which will help us understand Ruthin and its place in mediæval Wales.

Should we be Prepared for a Shock?

We can expect the full results immediately before Christmas.

Try as you may, however, it's difficult to keep such good news as the project's results under wraps. With the number of home owners now involved, it is perhaps inevitable that snippets of information are already circulating.

One is that it is now likely that our famous Nantclwyd y Dre could lose its title as Wales' oldest dated timbered town house...

Llanrhydd Community Garden

With its pond, windflower plants, 800 trees, seating and bat-friendly roosting, it was in June 2022's Town and Around that we praised the improvements on the former Rhos Street/Pen Barras school fields off Llanrhydd.

It has given this part of Ruthin a much-needed green space. It would now be good if more could use it. Early days?



Now, the site has an interpretation board which, longside biodiversity, hints at its recent history.

The site, of course, was once that of the former Ruthin Union Workhouse, constructed in 1837 and demolished in the 1960s. All that is believed to remain of a building that according

to 'The History of Ruthin' once housed 200 is a solitary gatepost.

The designers of the community



garden have nevertheless tried to lay it out to reflect the cruciform shape of the former workhouse.

Community-led Tourism

I was asked to write an article about one specific subject but it got me thinking about a wider range of what I see as closely-knit rural topics. So here goes!

In the early summer, despite thinking I had the best laid plans, I found myself needing to get back to Ruthin from London all by public transport. And it worked a treat (dep. London Euston 1107, arr. Ruthin 1530).

It also got me thinking about how little I use public transport, so over the summer I tried a couple of other journeys, using the the new Bws Fflecsi 33 (from Ruthin to Clocaenog and walked home); and the T10 (Corwen - Bangor via Eryri) from Cerrigydrudion to Tŷ Hyll (then walked to Betws-y-Coed and the T10 back to Cerrig). They are great services, which meant I didn't need to worry about driving, I was able to chat and play games with my daughter, I could admire the view, not get frustrated by other road users and not worry about parking. I am hoping the connections between Ruthin and Corwen can be altered so there is not such a long stop-over in Corwen at either end of the journey using the T10. At £13 for a family 1bws day ticket, it was very good value.

I am 'fortunate' to have a vehicle at my disposal 24/7, but if more of us do not use these bus services we are likely to find at least less of a service, if not a complete loss.

This is very worrying for rural communities, which are already being reshaped through premium housing costs, reducing public services and ageing populations.

Through some of the work that I do, I have been introduced to the concept of 'community-led tourism', which quite simply makes sense to me. It tries to ensure the provision of services in a community meets the needs of that community. So, can leisure activities, places to visit, eat and drink, food and drink producers be sustained by the community or do they require visitors? Yes, I know hotels, B&B's, larger producers, etc. need customers from outside the area, but are they providing something for their local customers?

How do we ensure that Ruthin and the surrounding areas survive and thrive in a modern world?

So it was very timely in late-September that the Clwydian Range Tourism Group in collaboration with the AONB hosted a 'Sustaining Rural Tourism in Denbighshire' conference at Nantclwyd y Dre, which, as a nosy-neighbour with an interest in heritage attractions and someone who dabbles in visitor information, I felt would be of interest and benefit to me.

There was a great mix of attendees: activity providers, accommodation and dining hosts, food producers, AONB staff, and a county councillor, among others.

Richard Hammond (The Green Traveller, not the car enthusiast!) shared his perspective on sustaining rural tourism in protected landscapes in the UK and abroad and Mark Griffiths (Woodfire Camping) entertained us with tales of establishing a successful low-environmental-impact camping and food business within the bounds of the South Downs National Park.

Closer to home, details of Project NOS discoveryinthedark.wales/project-nos were shared. The AONB is working as part of this North Wales collaboration to gain official status from the International Dark Sky Association, which would be an exciting asset to the local area, bringing great opportunities for local people and visitors year round.

All three of these topics inspired hope and generated discussions on how much our local area has to offer and how 'we' (the wider collective,

The T10 (Corwen - Bangor) offers a splendid ride for visitors and locals alike, via Uwch Aled, Capel Curig, Betws y Coed and, seen here, Llyn Ogwen. Expect better connections from Ruthin, soon



not the typical 'they' that we often see banded about on social media) might build on this and promote it.

There was also an open discussion around what support tourism-based businesses might need in light of the hangovers from Covid, leaving the EU and, more pressingly, the cost of living crisis and what gaps they can see in the local provision, with Ruthin being the central 'urban' area. The common themes were the poor offering of quality meals, particularly on a Monday evening, low footfall in the town and disappointment in opening hours of the town's key assets.

I am sure these are not Ruthin-only issues and brings me quite nicely back to community-led tourism: how do we expect our town centre and rural businesses to survive & thrive if local residents are not frequenting them? But equally, are the products and services that the residents want & need being provided?

Which Ruthin and district businesses have you supported this year? What gaps (for you, not what you think other people will use) can you see? And, rather like the bus services I used over the summer, both of which saw a leap over the summer thanks to visitors, are these enough to be able to protect them for the other 11 months of the year for the rest of us?

Answers on a postcard please!

15 Years Ago

The Town Council objected to the name of the town's newest housing estate on land at Glasdir Farm. Bryant Homes called it 'Rhuthun Parc'. The Town Council was concerned about confusion with Parc y Dre & nearby Y Parc.

Bryant, later Taylor Wimpey, began the estate in June 2007. It alighted on Rhuthun Parc but in December 2007 reversed the order



to the sensible-sounding 'Parc Rhuthun'.

Then, in early 2008, the name changed again, perhaps taking heed of the Town Council's concerns. The estate became 'Glasdir Vale'. This wasn't the last of it as, soon after, the developer settled on just 'Glasdir' which, after all, was in popular use, anyway.

Gala Occasion for Gayla House

55 years on, Peter Daniels celebrates what is probably Ruthin's longest established shop still run by one of its founders and asks what of the future



Alongside her mother, it was in 1967 that Carol Edwards née Rogers established Gayla House in a familiar corner of St Peter's Square. 55 years later, the shop's still with us. This autumn was therefore a cause of celebration.

Carol's mother Joan Thomas had been apprenticed in fashion retail in Liverpool. At the time Joan asked 23-year-old Carol to come on board in Ruthin, Carol was a hairdresser working at sea, enjoying a life Carol describes as 'carefree but false'.

Joan & Carol took over from Harris Jones outfitters and haberdashers. Harris Jones also sold school uniforms and even carpets. Back in the day, clothes & accessories were stored on the shop floor in brown boxes or drawers. At the time, Miss Harris Jones was 81 and sold brands that are largely now forgotten (or have passed to the Chinese).

The name Gayla House came from the family thumbing through pruned material in search of a name for the shop. They alighted on Gayla House and liked it. No one believed that the name Gayla House would stick. People said the shop would always be known as

Harris Jones.

In 1969, Carol established a hair salon on the first floor (now a stock room). Carol remembers at that time the proportion of such businesses in town was much smaller to that offered 55 years later! Some 30 years ago, Carol's mother remarried, moved away and it was at that time that Carol single-handedly took over the whole business, moving downstairs and closing the salon.

It was also at about this time that Carol employed direct from school another Carol Rogers, then a 16-year-old, now Carol Ann Dalton. Carol Ann was on the Youth Training Scheme, the 1980s initiative overseen by the Manpower Services Commission, an organisation Gayla House has seen come, go and has outlasted by some margin. Carol Ann's wage at the time was just 5 per week. Carol Ann left, came back, married, had children, came back again and is now a partner in the business, thus securing Gayla House's future.

Carol (Edwards) places Gayla House as selling 'middle of the road' women's fashion to those between 40 and 90. When Carol was more in her salad days, Gayla House pitched at a younger market segment, something again more apparent, as Carol Ann's influence brings with it different ideas.

Carol Edwards well remembers the glory days of women's fashion in Ruthin when in the 1980s and 1990s there were eight ladies' fashion shops in town. Here, then, was real choice and it attracted shoppers from as far as Merseyside and Chester. In fact, Carol remembers a time when once there was more choice of brands in Ruthin than Chester.

As proprietors have retired so the number has dwindled but Gayla House still has its regulars from North Wales, the Wirral and elsewhere. While Carol is naturally concerned at the impact of internet shopping, her experience strongly suggests that there is still a place for the individuality and customer service offered by Gayla House. Business over the summer is indeed



Carol Ann Dalton and, right, Carol Edwards

booming.

We readers on our part should therefore never under-estimate the importance of shops like Gayla House in bringing in regular visitors.

These days, Carol feels that the town suffers from fewer shops opening on Mondays and from a lack of a lunchtime quality food offer which, combined with quality shopping, is so important in bringing people to town. Those who visit on Mondays remark how nice it is actually to see Gayla House open.

Gayla House employs one full and two part time staff; and Carol drops in most days, which is not bad at all after 55 years. From her early days all at sea, it could be said that 55 years later self-taught-in-fashion Carol has well and truly earned her sea legs in retailing women's fashion.

Gayla House: a History

In May 1898, Mr Harris Jones took a 21 year lease on the former HSBC as a draper, hosier, glover and dressmaker, also selling floor coverings, including once fashionable linoleums. Upon the expiry of the lease, shortly after, he moved to what is now Gayla House, converted from a dwelling and previously called Florence House as one of the exotically names houses of Ruthin.

Retail Memories

The bookofyou.co.uk/ruthin-retail memories project is now available.

The Town Council project dates back to spring 2021 and, as you might expect in the current era of ever-changing town centre retail, a number of photographs are already out-of-date. Back then, shops were a constant.

There's no mention of Gayla House but you will see the former Harris

Jones premises where the HSBC is today.

Looking at some of the oddities & quaintness, the grocer J Oliver Jones at what is currently Clogau advertised dog biscuits and seeds plus it was also an 'Italian warehouseman' stocking exotic Italian goods such as pasta. There is a shot of Well Street with just one pedestrian, the early Tesco's and the demolished overhang at the Wynnstay Arms. Just in view in one photograph was the office of Gee's Printers, before it

moved to its better known Denbigh premises.

Visible at the corner of Well Street & Station Road is a pre-1968 road sign directing A494 Corwen traffic through town. In Clwyd Street, you can see the West Bromwich Building Society agent and the MANWEB shop. On the Square, there's the Wales Gas Board premises and Ellis Williams (now vacant, next to Choo Choo) offered 'hair brushed by electricity' at its 'toilet saloon' i.e. hair salon.

Singing the Praises of Unsung Heroes

The High Sheriff of Clwyd together with the Ruthin and District Civic Association have this month jointly hosted a social event to help recognise the work and voluntary work of eight unsung heroes in the Ruthin area.

At the Civic Association's evening social event of December 8th, the 2022/23 High Sheriff, Zoë Henderson, of Caerfallen, Ruthin, acknowledged the work of several local people, each for their long-standing contribution to the town and its life. The diverse recipients included a council street cleaner John Andrew Jones, long-standing Brownies leader Beth Taylor, long-standing youth football coach Wynne Davies, two community car service drivers including Eifion Hughes, school crossing patrol Janeatte Edwards and two local shop keepers Carol Edwards of Gayla House and Jan Thomas of Wayfarer whose businesses have both been operating for over 50 years.

Zoë Henderson commented, 'Part of my role as High Sheriff is to play a part in

recognising the contribution of those in the preserved County of Clwyd who otherwise go unseen or may be taken for granted. It gives me great pleasure to be able to do so in my home town. The recipients in Ruthin have genuinely and selflessly worked or volunteered for the betterment of the town and it is with some pride that I was able to recognise these worthy community champions.'

Chair of the Ruthin and District Civic Association, Anne Roberts MBE, added, 'Ruthin has recently been recognised by a national Sunday newspaper as a vibrant and forward-looking town. This in no small



RADCA Chair Anne Roberts, the High Sheriff, award recipient Beth Taylor, and RADCA committee member & Mayor, Menna Jones

part is because of the efforts of people like those who have received their High Sheriff recognition awards. Their contribution is warmly appreciated by us all. I should like to thank the High Sheriff for taking the time to make the awards and for the energetic work of the beneficiaries. Each one is truly deserved.'

The Quayle Award and Anvil Pottery

We report in this edition that the recipient of the Quayle Award for 2021 is the new Clinic adjacent to Ruthin Hospital. We thought therefore that it might be of interest to give a little bit of background to the award and the pottery where it is produced, *writes Robert Williams*.

One of the main objects of the Civic Association is to promote high standards of planning and architecture and secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of features of historic or public interest. Therefore, shortly after the Civic Association came into being in 1988, it was decided to make an annual award to the owner of a building or feature, completed in the preceding twelve months, which had enhanced and improved the quality of the built environment.

The award was named after emeritus Professor William Quayle of Liverpool University who had retired to live in the Ruthin area and had taken an active interest in promoting good architecture in the area. A plaque was commissioned from the Anvil Pottery in Llanrhaeadr and if you take a walk around Ruthin you are likely to spot one of the very distinctive oval plaques on some of the buildings which have received the award in previous years.

Divert off the main A525 Ruthin to Denbigh road through the village of Llanrhaeadr and in the centre you will find the Anvil Pottery. Housed in what was until the late 1950s the village smithy, the Pottery was established in 1981 by Allan and John Hughes who although rejoicing in the same surname were not related. John Hughes retired some years ago and Allan has carried on the business to the present date.

It is likely that the site has been

occupied since mediæval times and that the present building has existed as a smithy for up to three hundred and fifty years. Prior to Allan purchasing the property, it had become derelict and there was a fear that it could be demolished but thankfully that did not happen.

In making the conversion into a pottery, care was taken to retain as far as possible the original characteristics of the building. The workshop occupies what was the smith's workshop and the two forges, workbench, tool rack and housing for the forge bellows are intact and left as they were used by the smith. The pottery kiln and glazing area are housed in the former shoeing bay where, in its heyday and before the advent of tractors, up to twenty horses were shod in a day by the two smiths working there. The building is now Grade II listed. Coincidentally, the last smith to live and work there also had the name Hughes but again no relation to Allan.

The pottery specialises in hand-thrown stoneware and earthenware pottery, using traditional methods and techniques from earthenware clays. Most pots are thrown on the potter's wheel and decorating techniques include sgraffito, incising and slip trailing with the inspiration for design coming from naturally occurring shapes and

lines, some from Celtic designs. The finished pots are bisque fired before glazing using iron oxide as the main colouring agent and given a final firing.

The Quayle Award plaque is produced in the 'traditional' Anvil Pottery cobalt coloured blue slip glaze but the pottery also produces items in a rather distinctive brownish honeyglaze. Apart from 'shelf' items, the pottery accepts commissions for a wide variety of items.

So if you're passing Llanrhaeadr sometime and have a few minutes to spare it's well worth calling in to take a look at the Pottery and you might even see something you'd like to buy!



The First 50 Years of Station Masters in Ruthin

Heather Williams concludes her reflections on the railway by looking at local station masters & other railway workers

Although the Denbigh to Ruthin railway was opened in 1862, it was only possible to confirm the first station master in Ruthin from the 1871 census. This was Thomas Edwards, age 35, based in the station house.

Thomas Edwards was born on March 9th, 1836 in the Westbury area of Shropshire, the son of John & Elizabeth. He was christened in Minsterley Independent Chapel, but at the time of the baptism lived in Snailbeach where his father John was a wheelwright.

By 1861, Edwards had married Mary Mason and was living in her home village of Llansantffraid. Edwards was a shoemaker, living with his wife, also aged 25, with their baby daughter Mary, aged 1, and his brother in law Edward Mason, a boot-maker.

In 1862, Thomas and Mary had another daughter, Sarah, but by the time in 1867 they had their third, Isabel, had moved to Ruthin, and were all living in the Station House in 1871, the girls being aged 9, 8 and 3.

The family moved to Sowerby Bridge, Halifax, where Edwards's occupation is given as railway goods agent and local Wesleyan preacher. He remained there in this job for the rest of his working life.

According to the Railway Employment Records, in July 1878, J Jones takes over as station master but dies soon after, in 1880.

In June 1880, at only 27 years old, Samuel Beckett Rogers is acting as the town's station master.

In 1881, on census night, Station House in Ruthin was occupied only by Catherin (sic) Thomas, aged 56, who is a widow and former grocer (her relationship to the absent head of the household is mother in law). The reason for her being on her own is that her daughter, Mary, who in 1874 married Rogers in Anglesey, was visiting Rogers' elder brother John Rogers, who is living in the Whitchurch area. Another brother is also staying the night at Whitchurch, perhaps for some celebration. Samuel and his brothers were born in Chester and all are listed as clerks in the 1881 census. Samuel is probably the Ruthin station master in 1881. This, however, might have been just a temporary situation as, in the UK Railway Employment Records, he is based in Abergele as their station master from 1873.

Soon after, in June 1881, Rogers and his wife move to Abergele & Pensarn in June 1881 to live in Station House in Pensarn. The 1891 census suggests his mother in law is still living with them, and he and his wife also have a daughter, Mabel, aged 9. In the 1911 census, it states the couple had been married for 37 years and that the daughter was actually a niece, as the couple had never had any children of their own. Samuel spoke English, whereas his wife was bilingual. Samuel stayed in this job for the rest of his working life until 1916 and eventually died in 1929.

From June 1881, a new Ruthin station master, J A Vaughan, is in post. He had come from Nantwich but it was not long before he moves to Blaenau Ffestiniog, in January 1884.

In January 1884, Joseph Downing becomes the next Ruthin station master. Born in Dyserth, by 1871 aged 24, he was the station master at Trefnant living there with his wife Mary and a young son. By 1881 he was the station master at Blaenau Ffestiniog, living there with a new wife, Elizabeth and young family.

Aged 44, he and his wife from Llanfairtalhaiarn are now living in Ruthin Station House with their family at the time of the 1891 census. His son, John aged 14, is a railway apprentice clerk. He has four younger daughters and another young son. John Thomas Downing, aged 22, is also living with them, listed as a boarder (probably a relation) working as a railway porter. In April 1893, they then move to Denbigh, where Joseph Downing is made the station master. In 1911, he is 64 and retired from his work and living in Vale Street, Denbigh, still with three of his grown up children. The couple have had 11 children, of whom only six are still living. All the family are bilingual.

In 1893, Henry Hughes takes over as the Ruthin station master. Born in Prestatyn in 1857, he moved from Amlwch where in 1891 he was station master before Ruthin. In 1901, he is aged 44 and living with his wife Elizabeth and two teenage daughters. They are all bilingual. 10 years later and he is still the station master living with his grown up daughters in Station House, with his eldest daughter, Elizabeth, then a teacher in the secondary school in Ruthin. He died in 1933 in Prestatyn at the age of 76.

It can be seen that station masters came and went—like the trains. They came from other parts of North Wales and also England to advance their careers and then sometimes moved on. Notably Samuel Rogers moved on to Pensarn/Abergele and Joseph Downing to Denbigh, where they spent the rest of their days as station masters. Henry Hughes settled in Ruthin and seems to have found it to his liking.

Influence of the Railway for Work in Ruthin & Further Afield

In addition to station masters, there was a whole array of work for others, such as guards, signalmen, porters, clerks and track laying & maintenance platelayers.

Evidence of other people involved with work at the station & line is also given in the censuses. In 1881, William Campion, 49, is a railway clerk living in Market Street. Nearby at 12 Market Street another railway clerk is John Morris, aged 17, and John Roberts, a porter, is living at 47 Mill Street.

Railway Terrace, which dates from 1864, fronting the former railway line does not specifically appear to have been built for railway workers but being conveniently located some did live there. In 1891, John Williams, aged 59, is at no. 1 and works as a Platelayer. His neighbour, Albert Evans, at no. 4, is a porter, as is his 17 year old son Robert. Most of the residents nevertheless have jobs not associated with the railway, such as Enoch Evans at no. 2, a clothier's assistant, John Rowlands, no.5, a greengrocer, and David Evans, no. 6, a church evangelist.

The Railway Employment Records list 85 employees during the period of 1861 to 1916 who were based in Ruthin, many of whom were apprentices or clerks. (There are likely to be more but access to online records is limited.) It is obvious that the railway was a significant source of employment, particularly for young men.

The 100 years of the railway line from Rhyl to Corwen did undoubtedly have an influence on the employment of people in the Vale of Clwyd. You may have ancestors who worked on the railway. For example, my husband's grandfather, born in Trefnant in 1866, would have seen the job prospects that could be gained from working on the railway which had recently been built and ran through the village, transforming communication links. He moved to Chester to get a job based in Northgate on the Mid-Cheshire Line railway where he stayed for the rest of his working life. It's more doubtful if anyone in the Vale is now still gainfully employed in work connected with the railway, but you never know. There is a Network Rail van parked from time to time in Bro Deg, after all.

Summary of Early Ruthin Station Masters

1862-c.1867	Not known
1867-1878	Thomas Edwards
1878-1880	J Jones
1880-1881	Samuel B Rogers
1881-1884	J A Vaughan
1884-1893	Joseph Downing
1893-1917?	Henry Hughes

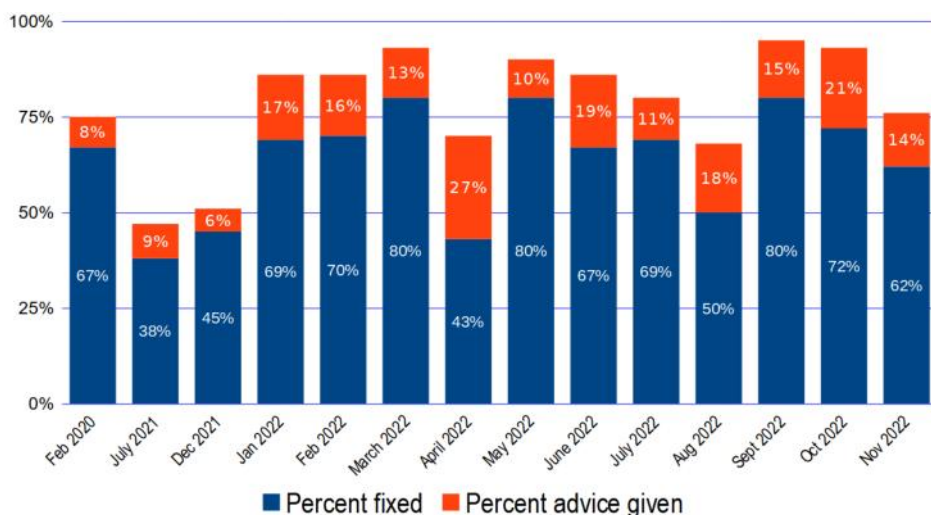
Mend & Extend. Repair with Flair

There's no need to send all your faulty or defective items to landfill. If you've anything that's broken or worn out, why not see whether the Ruthin Repair Café volunteers can help.

From small furniture to clothing to jewellery to electrical equipment, the Repair Café may have a 'fixpert' for that broken item. And they can help you help yourself: you can watch and learn and then, perhaps next time, be able to effect a repair yourself.

Over recent months, Ruthin's Repair Café's been highly successful in extending the life of items that would otherwise simply be discarded.

Ruthin's Repair Café started in February 2020 but for obvious reasons did not meet again till July 2021, then December 2021, after which it has so far met monthly. Over its 14 sessions to date, its volunteers have seen 400 items and



either repaired or given advice on 328 of them. That's over 80 per cent of those items presented.

Everything is free of charge (though you

may choose to give a donation). The Repair Café currently opens between 10.45am and 1.30pm on the first Saturday of every month, at the Naylor Leyland Centre.

Your Flexible Friend

It was 50 years ago this year that banking rivals to Barclay's launched the Access credit card. They coined the successful slogan 'your flexible friend'.

The same strapline equally applies to our new 'flexible friend' giving access to Ruthin, launched this year. Fflecsi 33 replaces the handful of occasional and infrequent bus services from Ruthin's smaller villages... and it also serves almost all of Ruthin's residential areas, some (and only some) of which were previously available two or three days a week and then only for a return journey.

Passengers on the previous village bus services had been declining for some years. So far, Fflecsi has reversed this trend. More than that, comparing to fixed bus services in general, Fflecsi Ruthin 33 has seen up to six times the number of journeys when compared to the post-pandemic expected numbers.

Fflecsi operates five days a week from 0930 to 1430 and the size of the minibus means it can make inroads into virtually any of Ruthin's housing cul-de-sacs previously unable to be served by conventional buses. It's also accessible for those with buggies or most wheelchairs.



Flexible friend with former Barclay's behind

Not only that, it's able to drop you off where the bus once couldn't go. Fancy some shopping? Try the town centre, Aldi's or Tesco's. Events, talks and workshops? Try the Craft Centre. Fancy a swim? It'll take you to the leisure centre. Have a clinic or hospital appointment? It goes to the community hospital door.

Fflecsi operates on demand. Booking is easy. Phone 0300 234 0300. It's easiest by app, though. Search for the Fflecsi app in your app store and book a journey in advance. However you chose, you need to give at least one hour's notice and to avoid disappointment make this longer (you can book up to a month in advance). You can book a return journey at the same time.

Fares are £1.50 per trip from the villages and £1 in Ruthin.

The second Access credit card strapline 'It takes the waiting out of wanting' also applies. Why not try Fflecsi this Christmas?

■ Available in Ruthin residential areas; and most local villages except those on bus routes 1/X1/2, X51, 55 & 76: details via 01824 706880

Hear Ye! Ruthin's Small Bell



A hand bell date stamped 1719 has recently been unearthed by Ruthin Town Council, writes Kathy Daniels. There was no known explanation as to what it was for, whether it was genuine or why it was stamped 'Ruthin'

Bell historians were able to offer an explanation. They considered that the bell was 'almost certainly' cast by the Ashton family at their foundry in Wigan, Lancashire. This was because of the 'font', oft associated with that forge.

It seems that many bells cast in the Wigan foundry were supplied to North Wales, including the fire bell (dated 1735) at St Peter's. The foundry, although in different hands, was active between 1646 and 1757. Although entirely speculative, historians suggest that the bell could have been the town crier's bell of the period, assuming Ruthin had such an office.

If anyone is able to add to or amend these details, please get in touch (p12).

Local Churches: Pragmatic & Positive Change

From Sunday October 2nd, the Church in Wales has centralised its Ruthin church services around St Peter's, following two years of discussions.

St Peter's is now the local hub church, where there will be both a formal and more informal service of worship each Sunday, at 9.00 and 10.30 am respectively.

The other two town churches, St Meugan's and Ss Mwrog and Mary (Llanfwrog) are not, however, closing. They will see services up to six times a year and 'specials' for weddings, baptisms and funerals. They are, however, being re-purposed.

During emotional services to mark the passing of regular worship at the other two town churches, the now retired Warden of Ruthin the Revd Canon Stuart Eavns reflected upon the past but looked to the future. He encouraged parishioners to express their sorrows openly but also their future hopes.

Among the obvious sense of loss was also one of a sustainable future amid new friends and congregants in a renewed faith community. Congregants were encouraged symbolically to set fire to their concerns and thereby consider a stronger future.

There is no doubt of the loss some felt. A few have been attending their local church for as many as 70 years. There is nevertheless a sense of relief. Declining

congregations have placed the burden of running the church disproportionately on fewer and fewer people. In such circumstances, the building of the church can be a millstone that detracts from the body of people, The Church.

As Evans himself says, 'Walls may crumble but God is steadfast'. He was looking ahead to 'a garment of praise rather than a spirit of despair'.

Moving forward in faith, there is a sense of renewed hope for the immediate future where previously it was impossible to ignore the everyday burden that comes with a declining congregation.

As far as St Peter's and Llanfwrog goes, there had always been those who crossed town in one direction or another to attend a service more familiar or more



Ss Mwrog and Mary, Llanfwrog

attuned to them.

In a sense, St Peter's and Llanfwrog have resulted in (or been the result of) cultural differences in Anglican worship. The arrival in 2010 of Evans has seen this become less defined. At this point, Llanfwrog moved from Cyffylliog and Clocaenog churches to join Ruthin's.

There is no doubt that October's change will see this collaboration and alliance not only continue but strengthen.



St Meugan's still known as the 'mother church' now welcomes walkers for private prayer. When permitted, it was a popular wedding venue over coronavirus

Over the previous couple of years, all local Anglican churches are now organised in the Dyffryn Clwyd mission area. The loss of Revd Stuart Evans and next year possibly a second local priest gives the opportunity to consider new ways of expression amid a declining but not a dying faith community.

Indeed, there are new ways of church in our communities: Café Cof in Llangynhafal; Drop in Fridays in town; Wild Church in Clocaenog & Llanbedr; and contemporary Sunday worship in St Peter's.

The traditional Church is growing in Llanychan; Cyffylliog has grown its worship to weekly; and Llanbedr is growing a new choral tradition. The church is exploring ways of engaging with youth: Teen Screen in town; Teens Go Wild in Llanbedr; Song School in Llanbedr; mum & tots' group in Llanfair; and Clwb Cynhafal in Llangynhafal. Llanyys recently won the National Church Trust Award for faith tourism in Wales.

Ss Mwrog and Mary's

From spring 2023, plans are in place to see Llanfwrog becoming a 'glamping' church, offering visitor accommodation for groups of up to 10 people who may stay overnight in relative comfort, aided by the construction in 1999 and subsequent improvements to facilities in the building.

Llanfwrog will nevertheless continue to offer services up to six times a year.

St Meugan's

Situated on the outer fringe of town in an area popular with local walkers, the 'mother church' has become a pilgrim church, open for private, contemplative reflection and prayer. Like at Llanfwrog, it will continue to see collective worship up to six times a year.

It is the second such pilgrim church in the Dyffryn Clwyd mission area, the first being at Llanellidan.

St Peter's

This will continue to offer regular Anglican worship, formal and informal, each Sunday at 9.00 and 10.30, alongside the growing importance over the previous 10 years of its other developing activities, such as The Bridge and successful Drop in Fridays.

Seen in Passing...

Literally seen, in this case: the installation of the Christmas tree on St Peter's Square this year comes with the addition of a CCTV camera. This follows two years of high jinks-related tree damage. We're used to businesses installing such systems, some even overlooking the street (e.g. Ruthin School at The Old Anchor, May 2005). We've even had part-time on-street CCTV (from July 2011) for occasions such as the festival, though this latterly was permanently removed. The fact that we've escaped public CCTV for so long but that it's here again surely says something about Ruthin.

We need no reminder of the so-called cost-of-living crisis. A notice pinned to the Farmers' Arms, Mwrog Street, says, 'Mondays & Tuesdays: we open at 6pm. If quiet, we will close at 9pm. Electric is too expensive at the moment'.



It's been sad this autumn to see the demolition of the much-loved Awelon and Canolfan Awelon. This, however, is the prelude to the construction of 34 new 'green' replacement apartments on the site.

On occasions, the HSBC has struggled to open. There was some irony about the poster pinned to its door this month, referring to the nearest alternative open branch, at Denbigh. Concurrently, HSBC confirmed it was to close Denbigh's permanently. Ruthin's is safe (for now?) though the notice reminded us we can use the post office.



We reported on the High Sheriff of Clwyd's award presentation (p8) but one of Ruthin's Zoë Henderson's solemn duties during her year in office was following the royal death and the proclamation in Mold of king Charles. As the High Sheriff is an annual appointment, the first such proclamation in 70 years fell to her. She was later present at the subsidiary proclamation, in Ruthin, seen here with the Chairman of Denbighshire County Council, Cllr Arwel Roberts.

Convenience grocery is set to return to the town centre in January with the current conversion of The Machine, Well St.



The the architects' premises opposite the BP garage we featured in June 2022's edition is now in use. Come and gone was this large dent, confirming the building's plastic cladding resilience.



It's also sad to note the further deterioration of the historic dovecote at The Castle. In addition to picture, the structure is also now jacked up.

During autumn (till near Christmas, in fact) the Library has brilliantly reminded us to raise our sights to the rooftops of Ruthin. We so often concentrate at eye-level but some of the chimneys and dormer windows of Ruthin are in fact remarkable.



In October, contractors closed Market Street for roadworks. Before the Highways Department reminded them that it probably wasn't a good idea to sign traffic the wrong way, the contaminators actually diverted traffic along Wynnstay Road.

Also in October, our library celebrated



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

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

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

The deadline for the next edition is February 18th, 2023

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

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Ruthin & District Civic Association

its 30th year in its current home. Things now appear more stable but readers may recall at its 25th anniversary there was a possibility it would move to County Hall.



Chalk-like window art now seems to be a 'thing' around town, with three examples on The Square at the moment. With the autumn changes to the management of the Market Hall came this attractive offering, above, on one of the windows. We thought it nicely summed up the town and surroundings.