

December 2018

Ruthin Town & Around

A collection of features & articles from T&A 2003-2018 to help celebrate 30 years of the Ruthin & District Civic Association



An introduction by the Chair of the Ruthin & District Civic Association

For 15 years, quarterly Ruthin Town and Around has been the Association's mouthpiece. Over its life, it has successfully blended comment, features & Association news.

The Association itself has weathered 30 years. We are still a voice when other campaigning organisations have withered. How so? One reason is the tenacity of its membership and of the Committee. But our longevity is in no small part owing to Town and Around. It's probably true to say that Town and Around has been the most instrumental feature in gaining—and retaining—members of the Association. We know from feedback that the membership and, indeed, the wider town appreciates it & they look forward to its publication each quarter.

And it has become the Association's main campaigning tool. Among the quarterly "good news" features there is challenging writing from a local perspective. And there is information that otherwise would never get an airing, not in the commercial press. All this, we try to reflect in this collection.

In its early days, Town and Around was a newsletter strictly for members only. Under editors Derek Jones and Miles Anderson, it evolved into something much more than that and it is now laid out as such. The



Committee makes this more widely available free of charge, while stocks last, via Ruthin Library. It has more-or-less become a stand-alone publication which could easily be sold locally but the

Committee feels it should still be free. Indeed, with the June 2018 edition, Town and Around got its own website, where anyone, anywhere can easily browse the latest edition.



As we celebrate 30 years of the Ruthin & District Civic Association, within the pages of this compendium is a small selection of the high quality articles previously published in Town and Around. Most are serious in nature, though some contain a little discrete humour, such as the problematic width of a former chair's feet!

Anne Roberts MBE

Getting About in Ruthin

GLYN EVANS cycles through our town and calls for “shared space” of St Peter’s Square

As a resident of Ruthin for the majority of my life, I have walked and cycled every nook and cranny of this wonderful town and I have to admit it is the best way to get around.

I was asked to write this article to provide a view of a cyclist in relation to the town-wide parking and traffic management proposals that have been put forward over the last 12 months or so, but I am not just a cyclist, as I walk, cycle, drive, sometimes use a train and have even been seen on the odd bus, so thought I would write about the wider implications of the proposals and their effect on our everyday journeys.

The proposed traffic and on-street parking restrictions that were put forward by Denbighshire County Council at the end of last year are intended to improve safety within the town and manage the on-street parking issues at certain hot-spots around key junctions. I got involved with the proposals because of my day job, working for Sustrans Cymru, where we aim to improve the environment to enable people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day, but also because I walk and cycle round town on a daily basis. My view is that the proposals put forward to manage the traffic in the town are prioritised to gain some additional parking spaces at the top end of Market Street, a location approximately 60m from an existing under-used car park.

A number of other one way streets were also to be introduced as part of the proposal but these did not take cyclists into account and no footways were to be widened to improve the conditions for pedestrians. Ruthin has a number of very narrow pavements where it is not possible for two pedestrians to pass without one of



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them having to step into the road. It is proposed to make Well Street one way for traffic travelling towards the Square, but numerous studies have shown that one way streets with no additional traffic calming measures tend to increase motor vehicle speeds and therefore reduce safety for other road users. No contra-flow cycle route was proposed either, so if you wanted to cycle from Boot’s to the Village Bakery you would have to cycle around the Square, down Market Street, turn left onto Wynnstay Road to reach your next destination. This is hardly the answer to making our towns and cities as pleasant as possible for pedestrians and cyclists, policies and actions that are being implemented across the UK to try and combat the obesity challenge, the environmental issues associated with over dependency on the private motor car as well as making town centres a pleasant environment in which to shop and spend leisure time. The recently published National Assembly for Wales report “Regeneration of Town Centres” recommended that “integrated and sustainable transport is a key priority in the regeneration of town centres”.

Ruthin is already involved in some excellent projects to improve the environment for walkers and cyclists and you will be seeing some of these changes come forward over the next year or two. Improved crossings on Rhos Street, Mwrog Street and at the Bricc Roundabout will make it safer for people to cross these busy roads; an improved entrance into Cae Ddol will make the area much more inviting to pedestrians and cyclists; connecting the shared use footway around the link road to residential and employment areas at either end will complete this route; and the provision of additional cycle parking at key locations around the town will all help to make walking and cycling easier for everyday journeys around the area.

But why don't we aim higher in Ruthin and look at making the Square a shared space area where all users are equal and motor traffic has to take into account what the other users are doing, not fly past the Nat West Bank as parents take a chance with a pushchair and its valuable contents. There is an excellent scheme at Y Maes in Caernarfon that, on completion, caused some noise in the local press as it involved change, but everything has now settled down, the shared space works well and allows markets and events, and even parking, to be held there and to bring the town together. Imagine St Peter’s Square with minimal slow moving traffic, wide areas to walk and safely cross the larger streets that converge on this wonderful setting, as well as planters, space for the Produce Market, suitable street furniture to allow residents and visitors alike to relax and enjoy the area. ■

RADCA instrumental in campaigning for Nantclwyd’s restoration & use

Arnold Hughes reports (in March 2003)

I have good news on Nantclwyd y Dre, the splendid building on Castle Street, which has been empty and without a function for so long. Denbighshire County Council now owns the property and has formed a steering committee, which has already noted technical reports on the house, and will soon start making firm

plans for its further restoration and future use. This emerged from a very useful meeting I had with Gareth Evans, Head of Economic Development & Tourism, responsible for the planning the house’s future. Official thinking, based on professional advice, favours a “Visitor Centre” with display areas reflecting the history of Ruthin and district (Iron Age forts, Roman occupation), as well as the

evolution of the property and town since the reign of Edward I. If all goes according to plan, Nantclwyd y Dre would be run in partnership by the County Council and local volunteers, with the Ruthin & District Civic Association having an important contribution to make. It will take two to three years for it to be up and running but it begins to look as if it will be worth waiting for. ■

Open Doors, Open Minds?

Former chairman and founding editor DEREK JONES offers a personal view

Open Doors, Denbighshire's annual celebration of architecture and heritage, is once again upon us. As ever, local people and visitors have a chance to see inside buildings which are not always open for inspection; to learn something new about them, or to see them from a different angle; and to appreciate in fresh ways the town's very distinctive sense of place.

It is as good a time as any to think about the nature and purpose of Ruthin and District Civic Association, which organises Ruthin Open Doors every year. Why are we here?

What follows is an attempt to answer that question. It's a personal view, and some may disagree with parts of it.

From the beginnings in the 1950s, civic societies have cared about the quality of townscape, buildings old and new. Some may consider this self-indulgent, especially at a time when people are short of money or out of work; but it is, I believe, healthy even vital to look beyond present economic difficulties. The enjoyment of our streets lanes and buildings is part of what makes life worth living, and to learn about their history can only enrich the experience of walking, looking... even shopping!

It is sometimes necessary to bang the drum more loudly on these themes. Regular readers of Town and Around will recall that, a couple of years ago, the state of the Castle Hotel was so dire that we had to risk the wrath of its then owner by publishing an angry article demanding the restoration of its fabric. She was indeed less than pleased, but what is a civic society for if it cannot stand up and be counted on an issue like this? There will be some who would wish us, similarly, to raise our voice against the so-called 'purple shop' now defiantly visible on the opposite side of St Peter's Square!

In the same vein, I wish that we had raised our collective voice against the ugly design of the Tesco supermarket. Of course, most people are glad to have the supermarket, but Tesco have been known to commission much more handsome buildings than this one (Ludlow Tesco was a rather fine glass-based building until the firm wrecked it). Ruthin Tesco jars not only against the Clwydian hills above, but with the Ruthin Craft Centre opposite, a building of national, even international, significance.

Incidentally, the Civic Association exists to champion modern buildings of interest and quality as well as making sure that ancient buildings are looked after (the Llanfwrrog Community Centre, as well as the Craft Centre, comes to mind). Ruthin is a living town, not a museum (there is nothing wrong with museums, I hasten to add).

I hope, similarly, that the Civic Association can see itself as 'living', in the sense that it is ready to change. To employ a not inappropriate metaphor, the aims and objectives of the organisation are not set in concrete. We exist, certainly, to promote civic pride. But that word 'civic' refers also to citizenship: our responsibilities to be well informed about local affairs, especially, of course, to vote.

The Association has, for some years, organised hustings, when candidates for the Westminster Parliament and the Welsh Assembly Government are subjected to serious questioning about their policies. But that alone is not enough; citizenship means much more than voting in our representatives and letting them get on with it. The Civic Association is best placed to push the boundaries of local democracy, say, in the direction of regular town meetings, like they have in the USA; they would be absolutely in keeping with our commitment

Regular readers of Town and Around will recall that, a couple of years ago, the state of the Castle Hotel was so dire that we had to risk the wrath of its then owner by publishing an angry article demanding the restoration of its fabric

to nurturing a sense of place.

But in this we are not alone. The Ruthin Festival, the Town Twinning Association, the Local History Group, the various groups who practice crafts, painting, sculpture and photography, to name but a few, are also concerned, in their various distinctive ways, with Ruthin as a place. Who knows what reserves of creativity and interest could be nurtured if they all came together occasionally to share ideas?

None of this, of course, is meant to challenge the Civic Association's main purpose—to protect the fabric of Ruthin. And never is that more relevant than at a time of economic hardship, like the present. I don't think the Association can claim much credit for the fact that shops which have been empty and boarded up for some time have recently been brought back to life. Their resurrection is very good news, but it remains part and parcel of the Association's job to keep a watchful eye on shops that may fail, and to think creatively about how best to prevent such events from becoming contagious. Why are we here? Well, for the moment that concern takes precedence over all others. ■



Two examples of designs that sit opposite each other



The Way the Wind's Blowing... the Great Energy Debate Comes Closer

News has reached us of a proposal to build a windfarm near Gwyddelwern—a proposal which is bound to generate considerable local debate, just as, a few years ago, that at Tir Mostyn did. The turbines would be visible from the roads from Ruthin to Corwen and Ruthin to Cerrigydrudion and would possibly be up to 350 feet high.

Whether or not windfarms are ugly or beautiful, quiet or noisy, contribute substantially to energy conservation or are mere drops in the ocean, are all matters on which it is possible for thoughtful people to have different opinions and we expect these opinions to have another thorough local airing in the months and perhaps years ahead—these things take time, as is clear from the fact that Tir Mostyn is not yet off the ground after years of to-ing and fro-ing between Denbighshire and Cardiff!



Public meetings were being held in Gwyddelwern, Melin y Wig and Derwen just as this edition of Town and Around was reaching the final stages of production. At Gwyddelwern itself, there was a clear majority against the proposal—on the grounds of visual intrusion and noise. Some of those present were not impressed that the plan had been six years in the making and was only now reaching the light of day whereas Denbighshire expect people who wish to object to do so in a matter of a few weeks! One of our members, Michael Skuse, who was representing the Campaign for the Preservation of Rural Wales, drew attention to the great expanse of windfarms already present off the coast of Rhyl, with many more in the pipeline. He remonstrated: "Why spend millions on a little scheme like this, spoiling some splendid landscape, when the offshore farms can supply all the electricity needed for Wales to make its contribution to the reduction of our reliance on fossil fuels?"

Of course, the developers had a different view—as did the farmer who proposed to sell land for the project! The developer believed that on shore and off shore windfarms were needed, and that the local economy would benefit—partly through grants that he himself would make. He said that noise would be insignificant, but had to agree that the proposed windfarm would be very visible.

The full plan, including an environmental statement, is available for perusal at Trem Clwyd, Denbighshire's planning office. There's a lot to read—as Ian Weaver, the principal planning officer said, "Bring a flask". But if you feel strongly about the issue in general, or this plan in particular, and wish your views to be taken into account by the county council when they make their decision in July, we would encourage to invest some time in reading the plan. There seems every prospect, moreover, that other parts of our "back yard" might be affected by such proposals over the next few years. ■

Why Risk Industrialisation?

Our July 2004 submission to the County Council suggested that till less controversial technology is developed, windfarms should be installed at sea:

- Wales must make its contribution to reducing fossil fuel dependence in proportion to its size and population.
- Wind is certainly a renewable form of energy. However, there is considerable argument on the proportion of our needs that can be met by this means, and on whether other "cleaner" technologies might be developed in the foreseeable future. That being so, much more attention needs to be given to energy conservation by both corporate and individual users than is currently apparent.
- Offshore windfarms are a positive development, which appear to be accepted even by individuals and groups who have hitherto opposed their on-land equivalents. While there must be a limit to what is allowed to take place at sea, this is where the main emphasis should be for the time being.
- On land, there is a considerable danger of indiscriminate proliferation. What may appear, at first sight, to be a small windfarm development may, over time, be allowed to grow. Further, there appear to be many proposals in the pipeline; if they were all allowed, the net result might well be wholesale industrialisation with negative consequences for aesthetics, amenity and tourism. That being so, the case for concentrating windfarms at sea is further strengthened.
- If, in summary, windfarms may in due course be superseded by new and less controversial technology, and if sufficient energy savings may be made by concentrating windfarm technology offshore, it follows that onshore developments should not be allowed, certainly in the short term. Why risk industrialisation, or landscape blight and disturb the peace of local residents, not to mention wildlife, if there are alternative sites (at sea) which present no such problems, and there is a possibility that in due course the land turbines will become obsolete?

Seen in Passing 1

Do you object to 'banner advertising' in Ruthin town centre? Recent months have seen a small flurry of activity on this topic following our raising the matter of its legality with Denbighshire County Council. It emerged that it was not allowed and the offenders were instructed to remove the advertisements forthwith. They mostly complied. But now, some have reappeared—albeit in a muted green colour, but banner advertising all the same. We have again raised the matter with Denbighshire, who promise to look into the matter 'even-handedly' (July 2004).

Have you yet decided what you think of the new Council Offices? "Could be worse", think some. All seem to agree that the Ruthin offices have a terrible finish, the 'joins' being especially singled out for criticism. What about the inside? We hope the County is going to have some kind of Open Day for citizens to look inside the offices—after all, in principle, they belong to us, not them (Sept 2004).

You wouldn't normally expect to go to a retail park like Lôn Parcwr for food and drink but, with the arrival of the relief

road, the estate does now lend itself to passing trade. So now you can stop and buy chilli con carne at Patchwork Pate (Sept 2008).

We wonder what you make of the green window at the chiropodists in Clwyd Street. It is, we think, rather glaring, though we realise that people's feet have their right to privacy, and perhaps any coloured glass would look rather out of place. We complained about the orange coloured Well Street Clinic when it first appeared but most people seem to have got used to it (September 2008).

THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Derek Jones, John Idris Jones and Bobby Feeley air their views about the new extension at Plas Meddyg

I'll be honest. When the shape of the extension became apparent, I was horrified. It's all too unbroken walls put me in mind of, yes, let's say it, a miniature version of a high security prison! As the scaffolding began to be removed, I modified my opinion.

The windows, previously not visible, do, to some extent, soften the stockade-like appearance of the building, and, if you walk to the entrance from, say, Market Street, the curvature allows you a sense of arrival, which is helped by the excellent mural on the old building, which has been retained.

The architect had a very small space to work with, and, in principle, I welcome his boldness; but this is a very sensitive site, seen by thousands of passing motorists every day. I just wish it had been possible for the entrance to face the road; then perhaps the building would not have looked so ungainly, especially as you see it from (the very terrible) Tesco building. DJ

Even though the round new addition looked ungainly a month ago, now it is finished and being used, I quite like it. It is an unusual and imaginatively designed, using the small available space in an economical way. From the direction of the roundabout, it is not self-explanatory, but a few yards further into Station Road, it takes on a new, friendly and welcoming aspect. Its circularity is modified by an amusing mini-buttress, and its window design, a black-framed modified T, is unorthodox. The one sign, a tasteful black on a well-plastered elevation, is a clear indication of an entrance function where the paving, edging stones, glass door and transparent passageway all combine in design cohesion. The extension shows every sign of being very well built (compliments to James Carroll). Aesthetically, it conforms to classical style in combining circularity with straight line in proportion. I think it is one of those buildings which are challenging at first, but after time and use we grow to like them and see them as character-full components of our home environment. JIJ

Ruthin seems to have had more than its fair share of controversial buildings lately—Tesco and the Craft Centre to name but two. The latest to excite opinion is the new extension, with for and againsts gathering momentum. I have decided, after careful thought, that I quite like it, and think that in time it will blend quite well. Let's not forget that what happens inside is the most important thing. How lucky we are to have such a comprehensive doctors' surgery in the heart of Ruthin, with dedicated doctors prepared to put money into extending and improving the premises. I think they have done the best they can on a very limited site to provide us with a new, improved surgery. Given the space available, the architects have come up with an imaginative way of finding extra space. Even the doubters will, in time, get used to the flat roof and the curved wall. Maybe Maggie Humphreys will come up with another work of art to break it up. I suspect that this time next year we will wonder what all the fuss was about. BF ■

Seen in Passing 2

Slapped wrists department! "Don't you dare suggest the demolition of the Star pub" was the response of a very authoritative observer of the local architectural scene after reading our paragraph in the last edition, which bemoaned the Star's recent state and considered its demolition. Well, of course, we take it back, but it still looks dreadful at present. Wanted, a friendly owner with deep pockets who has the imagination to buy and transform the Star for the next stage of its life (July 2009).

It's probably not unique but it is interesting

to observe that, in Ruthin, health centres for humans and for animals stand cheek by jowl in Station Road (December 2009).

There have been many critical comments on the colour scheme of the newly opened shop on the corner of Clwyd Street and St Peter's Square. It is hardly in keeping with this most prestigious conservation area at the centre of Ruthin (September 2011).

There has been talk of naming a road after the late Hafina Clwyd and we think it's a very good idea in principle. But the suggestion that the relief road, which has no name, should be dedicated to her memory



seems inappropriate, since all it does is to enable heavy traffic to pass through the town which Hafina loved so much. How about a room named after her in the Library? (Sept 2011).

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During the life of the Ruthin & District Civic Association and its 1988 predecessor there have been a number of housing controversies, in town and in the district. PETER DANIELS recalls some of them

There can be nothing like the prospect of unwanted housing to rally locals in defence of their patch. Each new wave of housing is resisted by those who already enjoy the benefits of where they live. During the last 30 years or so—during the life of the Civic Association—Ruthin and its villages were no exception.

It is of course thanks to the motor car that Ruthin has become a place where people chose rather than have to live. By the time of the formation of the Association in 1988, two (or more) car families were increasingly the norm and speculative housing developers were building to cater for those who wished to live here. This coincided with the ascendancy of Ysgol Brynhyfryd to its pinnacle some 15 years ago as one of the best schools in Wales, itself a major draw. Incremental improvements at the sewerage works also enabled development.

J E Parry (Rossett) Ltd was one builder who capitalised on the housing boom over a decade and a half. In 1976, Glyndŵr District Council refused planning permission on land at Maes Cantaba but granted it in 1982. Building began in two phases, including the second, from 1986, which tended to see larger Parry dwellings. The agglomeration of housing in this quadrant of Ruthin caused the newly formed Association to comment that, together with earlier developments at and around Erw Goch & Parc y Castell, the area was now nothing but a “blur of housing” and that the “change was not always for the better”.

There followed Parry’s 30-property development at Bryn Eryl nurseries. By now, the houses were all four-bed. Then, Beresford Adams estate agency waxed lyrical, stating that this would become “one of Ruthin’s most prestigious estates”.

Then came Parc Brynhyfryd, an estate of over 70 houses. Redrow had originally

planned to build a more mixed development but abandoned it because the district council wanted long phasing. It fell to Parry Homes to put up medium and large four bedroom houses plus some bungalows, between 1989 and 1993. A number of district councillors railed against the development, one stating that it would be a “threat to the character of the Vale”. Another commented that the Vale of Clwyd was not a sponge that could continue to soak up everyone who wished to live here without affecting its way of life, character and environment. And the head of Ysgol Brynhyfryd, John Ambrose, feared it would result in road safety issues.

A quarter of a century later, it is odd to think of Parc Brynhyfryd as being so controversial. It did, however, result in Glyndŵr considering future housing applications in terms of local needs for Welsh speakers, earning praise at the time from campaigning pressure group Cymeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg.

Meanwhile, a further controversy emerged in 1989 with plans to develop no fewer than 30 acres of land between Dog Lane and Lôn Speiriol Isaf. The whole town seemed to object

to the scale of development and its impact on the culture of the town. In short, the town felt it was unnecessary. It was outside the town’s development boundary and it ignored what had been a centuries-old town perimeter.

Developments were also springing up in Ruthin’s villages. Perhaps the most controversial was the late 1980s development of land at Clawddnewydd Farm. The developer was from Wolverhampton and it was in the Black Country that he vigorously marketed the Trem y Coed estate of bungalows. Locals felt that the housing was beyond their reach and that, again, the cultural balance of their community would suffer. There were similar concerns at Gwyddelwern’s Garreg Lwyd.

Between Parry Homes and the present, there have been few large-scale housing developments in town. One was at Maes Hyfryd, off Greenfield Road, where between 1993 and 1995 permission was refused no fewer than on four occasions before being built, as planners felt that the development on higher ground would have an unacceptable visual impact on the town.



Then, in 2007, there came by far the biggest housing controversy of all: Glasdir. This was a mixed development of flats, terraced and detached housing. With warnings of flooding, few at the time considered such a development necessary and there was next to no initial interest. Then, blighted by the 2008 “credit crunch”, its developer all but gave up. Town & Around called it “this tiny ghost town in the middle of nowhere”, disconnected from Ruthin. A latter article nevertheless found these houses to be well designed, quite attractive and more than acceptable. Sales did take off but in November 2012 tragedy struck with the flooding of almost the entire estate and thereafter building ceased, resulting in only a partly finished estate. ■

Glasdir—a 'flagship' for Denbighshire Housing

Denbighshire County Council aims to make the new development at Glasdir a "flagship" area which sets standards for house design, roads layout, provision for pedestrians and open space, for the rest of the county.

They make this clear in the outline application now available at the planning office and in public libraries. In its response, **KAY CULHANE** has welcomed the ambition of the report.

We say:

The suggestions for layout, street hierarchy, and cycle and footpaths are commendable, as is the intention that the needs of pedestrians should have priority over provision of the passage of cars. We are pleased that all existing trees, especially the black poplar are to be kept, as this will help create a sense that the area is established early in its life

We suggest:

It is highly desirable for Ruthin's social cohesion that as many local people as possible have the opportunity to buy houses. We hope that house building will be carefully phased, so that the new houses are not all immediately sold for commuters. The Brickfield Road area is currently an eyesore which could be greatly improved or screened with trees from the new development.

Consideration should be given to the provision of further footpaths linking the development with existing areas of the town, in particular Park Road and Cae Seren.

And we warn:

Despite the new flood protection scheme we remain concerned about the possibility that flooding may occur in this low-lying area. The risk will be increased once the development has taken place due to the rapid run-off of surface water from roofs, roads and other hard surfaces. It is essential that the open spaces within the area are grassed and that as many new trees as possible are planted and maintained to act as soakaways for this water.

RADCA will keep a watchful eye on the plans for Glasdir as they emerge over the coming months. Chairman Derek Jones said, "We must show ourselves just as concerned with people and modern design as we are with the heritage of Ruthin and District. Heritage is not just about bricks and mortar". ■



My Patch—Erw Goch by Hafina Clwyd

First published December 2007

Ruthin has managed to give its streets and housing estates some interesting and often lyrical names. I live in Erw Goch. Erw is acre, coch is red (an adjective mutates if it follows a feminine singular name; thus coch becomes goch). So I live in the Red Acre. There are 100 houses there, and number 100 faces number one.

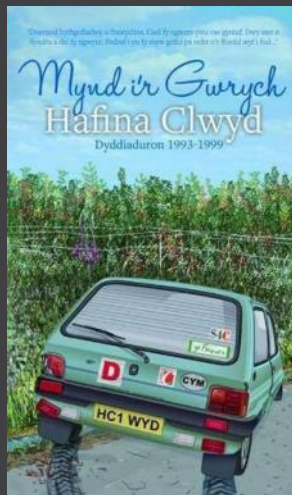
Not being very numerate, I'm not sure whether or not the estate covers an acre but the reason for red is fairly obvious as Ruthin is the red city built on red sandstone.

When I was in school there were green fields behind the Wrexham road, which were part of Castle Farm. The houses were built in the mid 60s; some of the original owners tell me they bought them for around £2,000.

My father saw an advertisement for this house in the Free Press, and Cliff and I came to see it, liked it and moved here on December 29th, 1979. Pickford's wanted £900 to remove us from London. A Rhyl firm did it for £200. I think they were sorry when they saw all the books and, of course, I was asked the usual question, "have you read them all?"

I like living in Erw Goch because it is near enough to walk to town. We have a footpath past the house which takes us down to Llanrhydd Street, past the hospital, and there we are in the

metropolis. Along the footpath there are six mature horse chestnut trees, and in May and early June we have a stupendous show of bright red flowers. I never tire of looking at them. Most Ruthin inhabitants do not realise that they are there.



When we moved here there was a field at the back of us, to which Richard Evans of Hendre Forfydd in Carrog used to bring his lambs every spring. We would watch them playing leapfrog. We suspected that one day houses would be built on that field, and so it has come to pass. This new estate is called Cae Castan, castan being the Welsh for chestnut the same word as castanets!

Erw Goch attracts some important people. The Town Clerk lives here. So does the chairman of Denbighshire County Council, loads of teachers, a retired minister, a member of the Welsh Assembly, and, not least, my cats, Wigley and Menlli.

*Our contributor, **Hafina Clwyd**, mentions all the important people who live in Erw Goch and is too modest to mention that she too is an important and well-known local citizen, writer, journalist and lecturer—she is, in fact, to be Mayor of Ruthin next year, and is currently deputy mayor. A well deserved honour, we think, and we very much look forward to the new perspective which her new office will bring to her contributions.* ■

'I Shop in Town' championed Hafina Clwyd

Recently, a couple of depressed shopkeepers said to me that they felt really let down because many people in Ruthin and district tend to do their shopping in Chester, Manchester and even further afield. This deprives our lovely town of income and can be one of the causes of shops closing down. I realise that large shopping malls are a real temptation. Nevertheless I am on the side of Ruthin and its traders.

I have preached this sermon many times in print and on air. I am very disappointed that some local societies even organise Christmas shopping coach trips to cities over the border, while here in Ruthin we see shops being starved to death. But when I tell people that I do ALL my shopping here in town, they do not believe me and give me pitying looks.

The main reason, of course, is that I do not have a car and cannot read bus timetables. So I cannot get anywhere. But do not fret, I am quite happy to shop in town. I use Shanks' Pony and take the seven minute walk down the path and there I am. And I can get almost anything. Yes, I agree, sometimes I have to pay more for some goods than I would in Chester, and, sometimes, some shops are a bit tardy about ordering stuff. But on the whole I have no problems.

We are fortunate. There are three supermarkets, two butchers and a baker. That's fine. I can get any newspaper I want from Castle Bell and I spend a fortune there. There are a couple of shops who sell computer materials, numerous hairdressers, and a couple of really good clothes shops; Carol at Gayla House and Jo at



Montecito really know their stuff and I love having a look and spending a bit every now and then.

We have chemists and garden centres, we have wool shops and an ironmonger, soft furnishings, leather goods, carpet and furniture shops. Also, a first class men's outfitters. Two good bookshops and a deli, opticians and florists. And Lewis Electrics can provide almost everything from carpet cleaners to television to cookers. What more do I want?

Well, there is something else and now I have to make an admission. There are a couple of things that I have to send away for or buy online. I know—it's disgraceful. If I needed a dinner service I don't think I could get one in Ruthin; but it doesn't matter as

I've still got the one I had as a wedding present. But I cannot buy shoes. There is a lovely shoe shop, but it does not cater for feet like mine. Before you start staring at them to see what's wrong, let me tell you. They are size 4EEE width. There is a long list of shoe shops all over the UK where I have walked out in tears cursing my great grandfather who bequeathed me the family feet known as Traed Cwm.

The other great loss is Majestic Travel. I really do prefer booking holidays face to face with somebody who can answer questions. Alas, it can only be done online now. One slip of a button and you could find yourself paying for a holiday for four. David or Matt at Majestic would never have made a slip like that. ■

The Strange Case of the Plaque that Moved

First published July 2006

After only 12 months, it seems as if the Ruthin plaques have always been there. Maybe it's because the colour is so pleasant and understated. Maybe it's because, with the help of the County Council conservation department, they've been so placed as not to shout at you. Whatever the reason, there they are, we hope for years to come, and having suffered only minor vandalism.

That being so, many local people have been puzzled that the Civic Association has been required to move one of the first batch, that outside the Myddelton, a few yards to the right. They believe that it looked better in its original position on the left of the main door to the Eyes, and are very disappointed and puzzled by the move.

It appears that this part of the Eyes does not belong the Eyes—if you see what I mean! The boundary between it and shop next door is just to the left of the door. So legally, by placing the plaque in its original position we were, if you wanted to be really strict about it, using somebody's property without permission. The owner determined to stick to the letter of the law.

We pointed out that our mistake was not deliberate, and that we could not, in any case, see that the position of the plaque made any comment on the ownership of the wall on which it was placed. It was merely a commemoration of the achievements of a long-dead Ruthin

businessman and a celebration of some historic and distinctive architecture; and looked very well in the position chosen. Our arguments cut no ice, and, early this month, we had, reluctantly, to take the plaque down, make good the damage—a very difficult job—and move the plaque to its new position.

The consolation is that we now have, courtesy of Cadwyn Clwyd, the Rural Development Agency and Ruthin Town Council, five new plaques. Those at Crown House and Rose Cottage pursue an architectural theme. Ruthin's history as a market town is commemorated in Market Street, and George Borrow's famous visit to Ruthin described in *Wild Wales* is on record on the wall of the Wynnstay Arms.

We think that there are now enough plaques in Ruthin for this generation*. We don't want the town to become a museum! But we are quite proud to have made a permanent physical mark on the Ruthin townscape, enjoy watching people read the plaques, and hope they will continue to be enjoyed by present and future generations. ■

*—Thanks to the Civic Association & funders, there are 21 plaques adorning Ruthin's more prominent buildings



First published September 2010

This Year, Next Year, Sometime... surely not Never

DEREK JONES reports on the inexcusable neglect of one of Ruthin's most handsome buildings

In an email to me (I was then chairman of the Civic Association) dated December 13th, 2008, Stephanie Booth, owner of the Castle Hotel, promised that work would start on the maintenance and redecoration of the Castle Hotel, St Peter's Square, in early Spring 2009. We had drawn attention to peeling paint not only on the windows and window frames but on the quoins which are such a distinctive feature of the building. The deterioration was, and is not, confined to the front of the building—although obviously this was in the most serious need of attention; the wall which faces on to Market Street was also a sorry sight.

Evidently Ms Booth saw our point. She also wrote, "The Castle exterior presents logistical problems and we need permission to erect scaffolding and/or cherry picker. These will obstruct the pavement for about four weeks and is scheduled as soon as we get some fine weather in the Spring".

What happened to the schedule? Spring 2009 came and went. Summer, Autumn and Winter followed. Spring 2010 arrived. And now, almost 18 months after the work was promised, there is still not a sign of scaffolding.

Meanwhile, the condition of the building has continued to deteriorate. One of Ruthin's most handsome buildings looks tattier and tattier. If work does not begin soon, another winter will be upon us and doubtless will be invoked as a further reason for delay. This year, next year, sometime... when?

On a purely commercial level, this can hardly be good for trade, and I don't just mean the tourist trade. The Castle's neighbours around St Peter's Square are also involved; they are mostly in a pretty good state but must surely feel rather let down by their big brother.

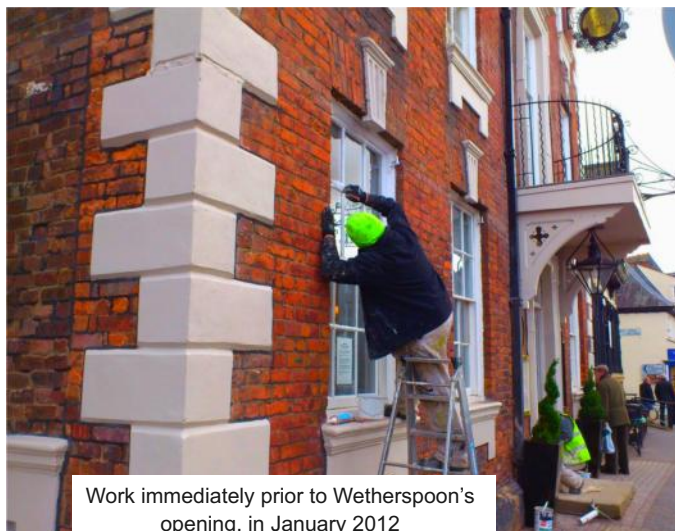
Wider issues are at stake. Edward Hubbard in his *The Buildings of Wales: Clwyd* (1986) suggests that the Castle Hotel, first built in the early or mid-18th century, is the "commanding" building in St Peter's Square. It has been a familiar part of the Ruthin townscape for nearly three centuries, one of those special buildings which come to people's minds when the word "Ruthin" is mentioned. To neglect its fabric is surely inexcusable.

The hotel is Grade II listed. We thought Denbighshire County Council could, therefore, insist that it is kept in good order. Apparently not. We understand that they can do nothing unless a building is actually falling down. They could surely, on the other hand, have a quiet word.

Stephanie is clearly an energetic person. She owns a string of prestigious hotels—Bryn Howell, the Chain Bridge and the Wild Pheasant in Llangollen; and Bodidris Hall, Llandegla; as well as in Ruthin the Castle and the Anchor. She has been flying the flag for Llangollen and recently bought the Wynnstay Arms

Hotel in Wrexham, the transformation of which will be the subject of the second series of *Hotel Stephanie* (BBC Wales) this autumn. In the middle of all these activities, her Ruthin properties seem at present rather low on the list of her priorities. It is surely not too much to ask that she should give Ruthin the same care as the rest of her empire.

It is unthinkable that the Castle Hotel should be allowed to deteriorate for another year. Stand up all those who value it as an indispensable Ruthin landmark. ■



Work immediately prior to Wetherspoon's opening, in January 2012

First published June 2016



Peter Daniels reviews the long term impact of Tesco, 10 years on

It's hard to believe that on July 31st 2016, Tesco will celebrate 10 years of trading in Ruthin. At the time, RADCA felt the building had little architectural merit. Its pallid, utilitarian structure now looking stained and shabby to the allotment side, is so different to the playfully distinctive Craft Centre opposite, yet there is little doubt which is the more important to Ruthinians.

Looking back at newspaper reports of the time, readers will recall something of a minor backlash when plans were unveiled in March 2005. The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) pointed to the downturn in town trade in Abergele, post-Tesco. A Co-op spokesman said "the application I believe will be the closing of the Co-op", pointing to Porthmadog, where Tesco had done just that. The county council nevertheless granted planning permission in August 2005 and the diggers moved in during early March 2006.

In May 2006, three months before opening and even before recruitment began, the developer sought a significant expansion onto the site currently occupied by Huws Grey. At the time, RADCA questioned whether this was Tesco's motive all along. Planners considered this not long after Tesco opened. There were siren calls about the affect Tesco was having in town. Councillors were told of a 20 per cent drop in town centre footfall and voted 18 to one against the increase in size. On appeal, a planning inspector overturned the county council's decision but Tesco never pursued the matter.

10 years downstream, what effect has Tesco had on Ruthin? It's difficult to attribute changes to any one set of circumstances. The answer is muddled by the growth of internet shopping, the 2008 credit crunch and subsequent recession. In spite of it, the Co-op survives, albeit with fewer lines. There is little doubt it went through lean times. Tesco forced Somerfield (the former KwikSave) to shut and the Co-op's endurance

relates more to the closure of Somerfield.

The FSB had said that "The new store would cause decay in the town centre and impact on the quality of life for residents". This was too pessimistic an assessment but there were nevertheless changes. Post-Tesco, the number of butchers reduced to two and newsagents to one, although Nature's Treasure also now sells newspapers.

The first store to close was Reebee's grocery side, in October 2006, blaming Tesco (and parking charges). The fact that this was the town's only remaining greengrocer would suggest that it was the arrival in 1992 of Lo-cost (now Co-op) that progressively put paid to town centre fruit & veg. Cllr Eryl Williams said as much during the Tesco planning process. Referring to Kwiksave and what had become Co-op Rhuthun, he said, "If you look at Ruthin now, things that were there have gone because the supermarkets have taken over And there is no doubt post-Tesco that the town centre cohort of open shops shrank but, from 2008, this could also be laid at the door of the credit crunch and recession. That number has subsequently bounced back.

What has happened, post-Tesco, and indeed post-Lo-cost, is a change of emphasis within the town centre. As you might expect, the town has fewer convenience and more comparison shops. Like most other market town in Wales, Saturday afternoon has gone quiet, yet Tesco itself is very busy at that time. ■



A Light Hidden under a Bushel

Miles Anderson finds a lack of welcome to Cae Ddol

Recently, I had a most pleasant stroll round Cae Ddol with visitors to Ruthin. We all found it a delightful experience the open grassy spaces—to walk, the recently restored lake and island with its swings were being well used that day, as was the skateboard section.

With such a pleasant park available for public use in our town it is easy to miss. Going down Clwyd Street you can quite easily walk right past it. There are no signs at the turning off the road saying "Welcome to Cae Ddol, Ruthin's Public Park". And if people are tempted to venture towards it, possibly attracted by the pleasant tree-lined newly constructed pathway by the river, the signs they are most likely to see are advising car owners about parking restrictions. There are six of them, two at the turning off the road, two other very large ones and two smaller.

The next sight is the public toilet block. This development once was awarded a Quayle Award. On the outside are numerous signs advising to availability, and payment required all very necessary, and even a plaque commemorating the award of "Toilet winner of 2009". However the steel reinforced entrance doors make it look more like a cell-block rather than a welcoming facility.

It is only as you actually turn into Cae Ddol itself that there is a sign announcing that you have arrived at the town's public park, and that rather than saying "Welcome!" is mainly devoted to advising of opening and closing times and what is not allowed.

Wouldn't it be nice to have an ice cream and tea stall there and welcoming signs both on the road and at the entrance? Cae Ddol certainly deserves it.

And while on the subject of signs, could there be a prominent one indicating Crispin's Yard? After all St Crispin was the patron saint of leather makers, one of Ruthin's oldest industries. And in this the 400th year of Shakespeare's death, Henry V's Agincourt speech precludes one of our greatest ever victories, mainly achieved by the Welsh archers, and that was on St Crispin's Day. Cae Ddol and Crispin's Yard have much to celebrate; better signage would bring in more people to enjoy it all. ■

‘Mold is a town buzzing with traders and shoppers. Where are we going wrong in Ruthin?’ Is the answer really car parking charges?

The universal answer seems to be car parking charges. People who look enviously at footfall in Mold need to consider like with like. Mold is more than a market town. Its population is twice Ruthin's but count the adjoining catchments of Mynydd Isa and Buckley and you have a combined population equivalent to Rhyl, Kinnel Bay & Towyn, over much the same area. Little wonder Mold is busy. This may explain why Mold is something of a paradox. Mold holds its own while other market towns almost universally suffer. Given its surroundings, the question for Mold, however, is why are there not more services in that town.

Returning to Ruthin, it's inevitable that people will blame car parking as a reason why Mold is more popular. People have always held that view. This is especially true since the increases in Ruthin car parks, from April 2016. It's still possible to park in Mold for a subsidised 50p all day (will that last?). Do the same in a Ruthin long-stay and it's seven times more (a fee that actually hasn't increased for long stay parking). 50p used to buy four hours in Ruthin. Now it won't buy an hour. The fairer comparison is actually £1.50 long-stay for three hours, said to be the optimum

Remember, though, that Mold was still considerably busier than Ruthin when Ruthin's car parks were free (charges were introduced on the Square in 1994 and progressively elsewhere in town between 1998 and 2003)



shopping & visiting time for Ruthin.

Remember, though, that Mold was still considerably busier than Ruthin when Ruthin's car parks were free (charges were introduced on the Square in 1994 and progressively elsewhere in town between 1998 and 2003).

When Ruthin's car parks were free, there was also direct evidence for space blocking. This happens in Prestatyn. We should also learn from Holywell. Car parks became free, workers blocked spaces, shoppers couldn't park and businesses demanded charging again.

Even recently, one Ruthin observer on social media felt that never mind the charge, it would be nice to find a space. What she probably meant was that there wasn't space when and where she wanted to park. There's a hierarchy of car parking in town, with the Square and Market Street being preferred. Post-Wetherspoon's, the pressure on Market Street has increased. Whatever your view of the new charges, they price off demand where there is insufficient supply. It's about aligning the length of time in a car park with an optimal shopping trip time and it's also encouraging workers to migrate to less popular car parks.

There are scare stories in the press and

on social media about the reduction in people parking. Footfall is also said to be down, as a result. Increase the price of anything and such a reaction is inevitable. No one yet knows how elastic this is: will it bounce back? It's simply too early to tell.

Surely, for a visitor, the ability to park at reasonable cost is secondary to the primary reason for visiting a town: its environment, its attractiveness and the experience it offers. Here, Ruthin wins (over Mold and many other places) and visitors are less likely to grumble about £1.50 long-stay. Perhaps that's also why Buckley is suffering, even though parking this time last year was free but charges now are modest: Buckley's still perceived as "empty". People often say they will travel to Mold to enjoy cheaper parking but that's barking!

People will elect to go there for other reasons: for the array of supermarkets or for the outdoor market (Ruthin hasn't the population to support our own: we've tried). But to abandon Ruthin simply because Mold's parking is cheaper seems odd. Fuel for an average car's round trip to Mold plus parking is no different to the cost of long-stay parking here. A more usual three-hour visit in Ruthin is £2 cheaper. ■

Ruthin Resurgent

ROBIN HILL takes a broad view of the new one-way systems & yellow lines with an appeal for pedestrianisation



The sudden appearance of so much yellow paint on our town centre roads has certainly got Ruthin people talking. If the whisper is true some local traders are “in a right tizzy” and have already met to share reaction amongst themselves. No doubt we will all soon hear their views and not just over the counter. Motorists’ inalienable right to stop and shop at will may be posed by some as a threat to livelihoods and others as an assault on personal freedom.

From the perspective of those of us who prefer to “park properly and perambulate”, Denbighshire County Council are to be congratulated for finally making a start on tackling the deep-seated problem of uncaring motorists. It is to be hoped that, should protest start, these first hard-won steps will not be rowed back, and that the confidence will be found to extend them further to make Ruthin again a place for people, as other towns, such as Tenby, have already done. Ever since “Traffic in Towns” was published in 1963, the debate has raged about pedestrian preference, traders’ travails and motorists’ misery. When strong emotions are evoked, or self-interest assailed, evidence and rational debate tend to fly out of the window.

Businesses are vital for Ruthin—and there are undoubted difficulties for small businesses in their current struggle for survival. It sometimes seems that the archetypal measure of business opportunity, that is footfall, is forgotten. Nobody ever bought

anything whilst driving a car other than, perhaps, a drive-through Big-Mac. Sandwich bar owners proliferate and may be tempted to conflate perceived parking difficulty with concern over Wetherspoon’s competitive offering; the newsagent will always struggle as on-line news delivery shrinks their trade, and print die-hards buy their papers with their groceries at the Co-op or Tesco. The key to greater success is to get more pedestrians past and through their doors with the time, and in the frame of mind, to browse and spend. That will best be achieved by making the town more pedestrian friendly and with shopping becoming an inviting, unpressured and a pleasant experience.

Motorists are also vital for Ruthin. Cars bring hinterland dwellers and visitors to the town and there have to be welcoming policies which further seek to ease traffic flow and enable motorists to leave their cars conveniently, safely and at low cost. There should be thought also for how they can easily then get to, and spend the time necessary, at the shops or enjoying the other amenities. The steps currently being taken will surely be acknowledged by rational thinkers as helping in those respects. Yellow is a stark colour but needs to be “in the face” to make a strong impression on those who have ingrained habits or are new to the town—it will soon fade and become accepted.

Most importantly, people are vital to Ruthin. Town centre residents should not be imperilled or affronted each time they leave their front doors. Consideration is needed for those who are less able, rely on mobility aids, struggle with sight impairment, push prams and pushchairs or otherwise have charge of children. Whether they live in the town centre or arrive by car or public transport, they should

be able to enjoy their visits. It is in this regard that more thought would be welcome, particularly given the topography of the town. The Arts Trail is a welcome and imaginative proposal and the associated improvements in pedestrian ways are good news but perhaps its proposers can give consideration to the less ambulant and those visitors whose time is limited and may need help in making the circumnavigation, as we as leaving time and energy to study and enjoy. From the Craft Centre to the Gaol or vice-versa, it is a fair step for walkers, and adequate time will hopefully be spent in one other or both to say nothing of St Peter’s Square, Nantclwyd y Dre or The Castle. ■



The Ruthin & District Civic Association publishes *Town and Around* each quarter. Free to Civic Association members, it is also available online and, while stocks last, from Ruthin Library.

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