

Town & Around O Gwmpas y Dre

Summer 2026



NEWS, COMMENT & FEATURES FROM THE RUTHIN & DISTRICT CIVIC ASSOCIATION SINCE 2003

More Commemorative Plaques for Ruthin?

**Heather Williams
explores the options**

Most people, both residents and visitors, will notice the various plaques which are on display in the town. Particularly notable are the green plaques that were mostly placed on buildings by the Civic Association about 20 years ago. Unlike the more well-known blue plaque schemes, these plaques are mainly to provide information about buildings of historic interest, rather than to commemorate people.

If you go farther afield, you can see a variety of commemorative plaques which include all sorts of shades of blue, green, red, purple, brown, white and black. Perhaps you have noticed that in St Asaph there are turquoise plaques, one of which

marks the birthplace in the High Street of the Powell brothers, who wrote the First World War song 'Pack up your Troubles'.

In the UK, various organisations have been responsible for erecting plaques, which include civic societies, historical societies, and town, city and borough councils. In addition there are also English

Heritage and Historic Environment Scotland (both equivalent to CADW), which tend to focus on people for the blue plaques scheme. Here in Wales there is no 'proper' official blue plaque scheme overseen by an overarching government organisation, although there has been a call for this by at least one member of the Senedd in

recent years.

In Wales, according to information from one source on the internet, there are an estimated 250 blue plaques in Wales. We think it's probably higher than this. For example, there are 39 plaques in the Rhondda Cynon Taf principal area that commemorate buildings, events and some notable people.

In 2017, 'purple plaques' was launched on International Women's Day by a group of volunteers who felt the need for more recognition for the contribution women make to Welsh life. These include one for Megan Lloyd George in Criccieth, the first female MP for a Welsh constituency and Eirene White in Flint, a journalist and pioneering politician.

Ruthin & District Civic Association has been contacted about the possibility of having a plaque to commemorate Furness Williams, an internationally known tenor singer who was born in Ruthin in 1878 who lived in his childhood with his family in the town at the beginning of Llanfair Road, near the 'Anchor Corner' (now a boarding house for Ruthin School). Coming from a musical family, John became a member of the St Peter's Choir, along with other



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Square Deal: building pains... for better days

Omelettes and eggs?

It's good to see things moving apace as regards the public realm improvement on the Square. Once we can begin to visualise the approximate layout and the quality of material—as we now see—sceptics should be more inclined to welcome it. We watched this unfold in Llangollen: most doubters revised their view.

But it was nevertheless a surprise

on Tuesday May 26th, 2026 to wake up to fencing, bollards and whole new traffic management regime on the Square. It was worse still for the Square's traders, who were caught entirely off guard and who had been preparing for a promised later summer start after the annual festival.

No one seemed aware of what was going on and this lack of consultation was in contrast to the otherwise improving engagement with traders

and affected residents to date.

Still, the May works now give as good a preview as possible of what the scheme will look like. Although fences during the works currently prevent pedestrian movement around the Square, the final scheme will be nothing short of genuinely transformational rather than merely agreeable.

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From the Chair

Following the completion of the ongoing roadworks, questions will be asked as to how we can try to increase footfall in our town.

Ruthin has a strong identity, rich history, and a loyal local community but increasing footfall requires giving people more reasons to visit regularly and to stay longer. A combination of events, better promotion and stronger collaboration between businesses can make a real difference.

One effective approach would be to create more attractions in the town centre. Seasonal markets, food festivals, live music, and family-friendly events can encourage both residents and visitors to spend time in Ruthin.

Highlighting Ruthin's heritage and independent shops will help the town to stand out from larger retail centres.

Digital promotion is also essential. Local businesses and



organisations should work together to market Ruthin through social media, tourism websites, and regular campaigns. Sharing events, special offers and incentives, and success stories can attract visitors from across North Wales and further afield.

We are beginning to see that working together is a good idea: Ruthin Castle, Nantclwyd y Dre and the Gaol have come up with ideas while doing so. We need to build on this, to try to create a more vibrant town for both locals and visitors.

Some food for thought while the roadworks continue! I would be pleased to receive any ideas from you, the readers, to help improve the visitor experience, and also to make our town more attractive to residents too.



Missed: another seasons

The Cuning Green has haunted local conversations in Town & Around for years now, a running thread of frustration that refuses to untangle itself. What was once a simple footpath remains stubbornly closed. And the seasons keep turning.

Each year seems to bring fresh promises of reopening but only delivers disappointment. This year's hoped-for

spring arrival never quite materialised and summer will no doubt pass without change.

The heart of the matter lies with the County Council, who has a duty of care regarding the footpath. They must be certain that the wall presents no hazard, not just at the point of its most recent collapse but along its entire length. It is a reasonable position in principle.

In practice, has this become a convenient holding pattern? To lay people like ourselves, the wall at the collapse site appears adequately repaired. Yet the path remains closed.

The County Council,

the Castle authorities, and the various landowners who hold pieces of this puzzle must finally put their heads together and solve it. What was once patience now borders on negligence.

Even as the main crisis persists, a secondary problem looms largely unaddressed. The Lord's Garden's boundary wall, more recently partly destroyed by a fallen tree, gapes open. Here too, a third-party landowner complicates the repairs and, here too, silence prevails. Are there any plans at all, or has this become simply another problem waiting to be forgotten?

Square

From p1

After delays because of civil engineering hold-ups, the works are accelerating. This time next year, we shall probably look back on this as a minor hiccup. For now, we again implore readers to rally to the support the town and its embattled traders.

Come the 2027 season, will the town be ready to boast of its new environment and be ready to welcome back visitors (and residents)? What arrangements will be in place?





A statement from the Executive Committee to all members & readers

The Ruthin & District Civic Association Committee has recently been reflecting on the organisation's future, and the committee has decided to issue this statement as a matter of urgency. All current committee members have served for a considerable time, and while their work has been both enjoyable and rewarding, the committee recognises that new people and fresh ideas are needed. The quarterly newsletter, though successful, has become increasingly challenging to produce, with difficulties in sourcing content and managing the editorial workload. Similarly, other committee officers find themselves bearing a voluntary workload that has become increasingly difficult to sustain without additional support.

The Civic Association has periodically appealed for members to join the committee or become more involved, but these appeals have not significantly improved the situation. The committee understands that members have busy lives with family and other commitments that may prevent them from dedicating time to the organisation. However, the committee believes the current

situation cannot continue indefinitely. Without fresh involvement, there is a real risk that existing officers may be unable to continue, which could lead to the Association dissolving. This statement is therefore an urgent appeal to all members to consider becoming more involved with the Association and, particularly, to join the committee. The committee also welcomes suggestions from members about people who might wish to join and help secure the Civic Association's future.

The Civic Association was established in 1988 as a registered charity and operates according to its constitution approved by the Charity Commission. The organisation has three main objectives: to promote high standards of planning and architecture in the area; to educate the public about the area's geography, history, natural history and architecture; and to preserve and improve features of historic or public interest. It is governed by an executive committee of nine members, including a chairman, vice-chairman, treasurer and secretary, plus five other members, along with the editor of its quarterly newsletter.

Over the decades, the Civic Association has become a well-respected voluntary organisation in Ruthin and the surrounding area. It has organised numerous talks, visits and activities, published a book of

walking routes around Ruthin, and co-ordinated the annual Open Doors weekend in partnership with CADW. Since 2003, it has produced an informative quarterly newsletter called *Town & Around*, which is distributed to members and available at Ruthin Library. The Civic Association has also successfully secured grants to fund the restoration of the former railway crane at the Craft Centre and supported the O'r Ty Hwn/From This House project. Other notable initiatives include the annual Quayle Award and the installation of green plaques on significant buildings throughout the town.

If the committee does not receive sufficient positive responses and cannot reasonably guarantee that the Civic Association can continue operating, it may regrettably be forced to take steps to dissolve the organisation. Hopefully it will not come to this. Members and interested parties are encouraged to contact the Secretary to express their interest in becoming involved with the Association.

■ Members and interested parties are encouraged to contact the Secretary to express their interest: details of how on the back page

Levelling Update

Levelling Up Progress Across the Town

Nantclwyd y Dre and Old Gaol

The house is experiencing significant transformation, as this levelling up project nears completion (due in early June, 2026). The historic house has welcomed three new front of house staff to enhance the visitor 'experience', and important accessibility improvements have been made with the installation of lavatories for disabled visitors and baby-changing facilities. The kitchen in the volunteer room is now finished, and the brewhouse, particularly rare and valuable feature for a house of this type, is ready to open.

The holiday rental property designed to generate income for the house is being finalised, with the nearby upstairs office recently completed. To streamline rental operations and reduce the burden on staff and volunteers, the property is likely to be managed and marketed by an established holiday rental provider, ensuring professional oversight while minimising administrative work locally.

At The Old Gaol, excitement is building as the café nears completion.

Rather than being run in-house, it will be outsourced to a third party, and expressions of interest are currently being sought from potential operators.

Some have expressed concern that this new café might draw trade away from existing town centre premises. However, this worry is somewhat allayed by the fact that there are no established food outlets in that particular area of town. It is worth noting, however, that nearby Park Place now offers coffee and cake from 11.00 a.m., adding to the town's refreshment options.

St Peter's Church

This is also approaching the finish line on its own levelling up journey, and the transformation has genuinely impressed visitors and residents alike. People continue to remark on the improvements to both the church's interior and its structure, with many commenting that the building looks better than at any point in living memory. One resident particularly welcomed the news that it would become a community facility alongside its primary role as a place of worship.

To offset an unexpected VAT-related financial challenge that arose during the project, the church needs to hire its facilities soon, to groups, businesses and organisations across the community.



The arrival of a commercial kitchen will support this new venture, though it still requires fitting. The imminent conclusion of the sale of 10 Mwrog Street will bring in a significant five-figure sum to help address these costs.

A few finishing touches remain outstanding, including to the rear of the building. The last remaining window's been reinstalled, though. On a seasonally apt note, the church heating system is now fully resolved (!) and ready for use well ahead of the colder months ahead.

The church is also open more often than in the most recent couple of months but we must remember that the the scale of the investment requires 'staffing' as far as is practical.

Contact the church if you can help (or via the Secretary: back page for details).

Apathy Rules

Attendance at the hustings ahead of the May 2026 Senedd elections was disappointing. Present to see six candidates were exactly 50 people, about 20 of whom were stewarding from organisers the Civic Association or Friends of the Earth. And 10 were associated with one or both of these organisations in one way or another.

This time, the numbers attending barely justified the work put in principally by the Civic Association's Rob Price.

We asked ourselves why, when previous hustings have tended to be so well supported. We put it down to general apathy among the electorate and behaviours reported at the time to be very different at the ballot box than in elections of yore (which turned out to be true). Candidates noted to organisers

that hustings elsewhere in the new constituency of Clwyd were similarly poorly supported.

All six invited political parties sent a representative. Most were at the top of their respective list.

All candidates bar one were well behaved when answering questions. This made a refreshing change from the pressured and sometimes chaotic hustings of the past. The chairman Tim Jones was appropriately strict. This gave the opportunity to understand better each parties' policies. That the Civic Association and Friends of the Earth were able to filter & combine pre-selected questions beforehand resulted in a more rounded suite of queries that felt right and focused on devolved issues.

Hours Well Spent

The Joseph Peers Memorial clock tower in Ruthin has been shortlisted for the RICS UK Awards 2026 Heritage category.

The grade II listed Victorian structure, built in 1883 by architect John Douglas, underwent restoration between August and December 2024.

R Moore Building Conservation Ltd completed the conservation work under architect Elinor Gray Williams's guidance. The project aimed to restore the clock to its original condition without alteration. The landmark commemorates Joseph Peers's 50 years of community service as Clerk of the Peace.

Winners will be announced at regional ceremonies, with finalists competing at the UK Grand Final in October 2026.

Town Council: A year of transformation and investment



Peter Daniels reflects on his Mayoral year

Ruthin Town Council has demonstrated remarkable progress during 2025/26 in establishing robust governance and financial compliance. Having addressed a substantial backlog of outstanding audits spanning 2020/21 to 2023/24, the council submitted all financial statements to Audit Wales, with 2024/25 accounts submitted early. This determined effort showed genuine commitment to transparency and accountability.

The council has implemented substantial improvements across multiple areas. Enhanced financial management now includes proper accruals accounting, while all council decisions are properly recorded through formal procedures with appropriate proposing, seconding and voting.

Significantly, all Full Council agenda

and papers are at last published online in advance, ensuring genuine public accessibility.

Staff management has strengthened considerably through proper appraisals and appropriate monitoring, while the budget-setting process now occurs early and in full compliance with legal requirements. From 2026/27, the council will streamline operations by reducing meetings to one monthly session, combining committee work into ordinary councils. The Auditor General's assessment confirms audits were properly prepared and governance arrangements appropriate.

The council has implemented a successful 12-month parking pilot with the County Council, offering free parking that has demonstrably increased usage across all three target car parks compared to the previous year, particularly in short-stay parking. Major public realm works began in March 2026 under the Local Regeneration Fund, with the Town Council championing this as a 'critical friend', that when completed with show off the town's heritage while balancing parking availability with future hospitality opportunities.

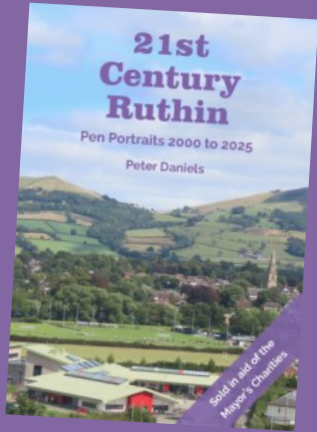
The impressive Parc Clwyd initiative, securing £200,000 in grants, will transform Cae Ddôl Park with outdoor gym equipment, wheeled sports facilities, and habitat improvements. Ruthin Future 2026 achieved community participation with over 300 people attending engagement events and 500 participating through exhibitions. The plan since 2010 has been a catalyst that has seen a total investment of over £10m.

The Town Council distributed over £10,000 in grants to 11 organisations. The Good Citizen Awards celebrated outstanding contributions, while the

Still Available!

'21st Century Ruthin: Pen Portraits 2000 to 2025' may not go back as far as the book on Llanelidan but you can still be assured of a lively read.

Copies are available for sale at Ruthin Library. Cost £10.00 each. c. 40,000 words. Proceeds after costs to three charities undertaking local work.



Mayor's charitable fundraising exceeded £7,200, supporting three charities working locally. The council has also secured improvements to public facilities, including the Crispin Yard lavatories refurbishment, while completing remedial work to the war memorials and some work to the Tom Pryce memorial.

■ The Mayor 2025/26 would like to thank Ruthin & district residents for their kind words and their support, especially towards the mayoral charities in raising over £7,200. The Mayor 2025/26 offers his congratulations to Cllr Christine Ellis as the new Mayor of Ruthin 2026/27.

Our Story Set in Stone

To those like Brian Hubble, Ruthin's buildings read like a geology lesson. At a Civic Association meeting in April, he took us vicariously around town

The Vale of Clwyd is a seam of surprises. Geologically, a major fault exposes older rocks above newer ones, on top of which are later drift deposits. They all played their part in the construction of Ruthin's buildings.

All of this was dictated by what builders could lift, cart and live with, so the town's streets are a sort of patchwork map of what lay underfoot.

The oldest houses and public buildings, 15th and 16th century survivors such as The Old Stables in Mill Street and parts of St Peter's, use rough-cut blocks of Carboniferous limestone in varying hues and fossil richness.

By the 1800s, cutting technology had matured, and ashlar blocks made austere, mortar-sparing façades possible: the Old Gaol, with its fossil-rich sills, and the layered Market Hall show how craftsmen learned to play the different limestone beds against each other to great effect. Rhos Street, with the former school, remains a particularly cohesive example of limestone street scene.

Then there is the dramatic red of the Permo-Triassic sandstone, exposed at Red Rocks at Llanrhydd, possibly the origin of a local quarry. Ironically, Ruthin town centre scarcely uses this red

sandstone in bulk, Ruthin Castle and the Plas Coch façade aside, yet its influence is evident in detailing elsewhere. St Peter's, for instance, marries pale limestone walls with red sandstone dressings. The Castle gatehouse and the Almshouses at Christ's Hospital perform the same pared complementarity. That contrast (pale, massive limestone alongside warm, carved sandstone) is one of Ruthin's visual signatures.

But not all sandstone ages well. Sedimentary wind-blown sands produced a friable stone that looked handsome in carved detail but weathered badly without the cementing minerals of more distant varieties. Crumbling examples appear at the Catholic church entrance in Mwrog Street and on parts of the Castle walls. The sandstone worsens where heavy limestone above compounded erosion below.

The solution, when transport became cheaper, was to import tougher stone: Runcorn supplied replacement limestone. County Hall boasts columns of Norwegian feldspar-rich larvikite that now could do with a polish. Sandstone less distant, from Hirwaun and from the Coedpoeth-

Ruabon band proved more durable. Cefn Mawr supplied the massive yellow blocks for the lending library portico before railways changed economics.

Small-scale industry left its mark too. Drift deposits of glacial sand and clay gave rise to local brick-making at Cae Bricks. The poorer-quality bricks survive, once rendered or later treated with modern resins at places like Finline on Clwyd Street, where weatherproofing has become necessary.

If you want a one-stop lesson in rock types, the War Memorial assembles them: granite, slate and sandstone meet in solemn harmony.

Yet the town's link to local geology is fraying. Current paving on Well Street, labelled 'York' stone, is quarried in India. Granite kerb stones come from China.

Ruthin's streets still tell the story of the Vale beneath them, but the chapters are closing on a softer, imported future.

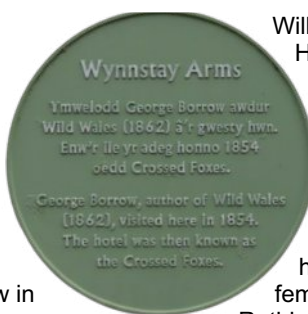


Plaques

From p1

members of his family. He sang at local concerts, particularly at Ruthin Castle where the Cornwallis Wests had frequent house parties. Initially to earn a living, he worked as a plumber in Barrow in Furness, which then led him to change his name to include Furness. He trained as an opera singer with the Liverpool born singer Sir Charles Santley and studied languages in Milan, which subsequently led to his being appointed as principal tenor at the Royal Opera in Covent Garden for three seasons. After singing all around the world, he eventually returned to Ruthin and is buried in St Meugan's churchyard, Llanrhydd, with one of his older brothers, next to their parents in June 1957 aged 79 years old.

Another contemporary baritone opera singer who also lived in Ruthin was Charles Moorhouse, who in his early life was also engaged singing with Furness



Williams for the Carl Rosa and Harrison Frewin Opera companies. He lived in Plas Coch at the start of the Second World War as a retired hotel proprietor, although in the 1911 census he was a professional opera singer. (We, of course, now have two young contemporary female opera singers from Ruthin: Scarlett Jones and Lisa Dafydd!)

Another person was mentioned at a local history meeting. Her name was (Annie) Grace Roberts. She, together with Megan Lloyd George, was one of the first two ladies in Wales to stand for Parliament in 1929, although she failed to get elected as a Liberal MP. Grace, born in 1879, lived above the saddler's shop which her father and grandfather owned (now the butcher's shop in Clwyd Street). Her older brother, Alderman T J Roberts became an eminent local figure in the town. She qualified as a teacher in Bangor and then became a journalist, which was when she became interested in politics. She married George Bowen

Jones in Cardiff in 1930 and after living elsewhere in Wales she returned to Ruthin in 1938, spending her time writing and being involved in the Eisteddfodau. She died in 1962, having lived the last part of her life at Rhydŵrial (the site now known as Vale Country Club).

Then, there is Hafina Clwyd. Derek Jones pressed for recognition for her in the March 2019 edition of Town & Around, available online.

So what do you think? Should we have commemorative plaques to mark some past *people* who were residents of Ruthin? How would we decide who was worthy of having a plaque? There are so many people in the past who have been significant members of society, it might be difficult to choose who was worthy. (NB English Heritage states it must be at least 20 years after their death.)

Permissions would need to be sought on suitable premises which can be seen by the public, and it is likely that funding for new plaques would also need to be obtained.

■ Please let us know your views on ruthincivic@btinternet.com.

Using art to look at Ruthin and surrounding landscape

From squishing clay into stonework to cranking printing presses, Heather Williams works hard for his art

Recently there have been opportunities to engage with art through printing activities organised by the Craft Centre and other partners, so I went along to try a couple of these.

In March, as part of 'Ruthin Future', there was a 'Look up' guided walk with the artist Haf Weighnton who took a small group of us from The Old Courthouse, down Market Street to the Craft Centre. At the start we were each given a print pad, some plasticine and concertina paper, which created a small sketch pad



Haf Weighnton at the Craft Centre

for us to use. During the walk we looked out for various little features on the buildings and street furniture which could be used to press our plasticine into in order to create a record in our little sketch pads.

It's amazing what you can see when you start to look at the detail at what is along the street.

Have you noticed the beautiful letter box by the Cavendish estate agents? Or the different texture on the stonework and the Phoenix ironwork mark at Bathafarn Chapel? Take a look when you next go along Market Street. At the end we viewed Haf's exhibition 'High Street', which included composite images of Clwyd Street in Ruthin, as well as images of other places such as Wrexham.

In April a print workshop was

organised by the Craft Centre and Clwydian Range Natural Landscape staff to create prints inspired by the features of the area. Currently Ruth Thomas, who was the tutor for the session, is working on a set of 50 prints, which include the landscape, flora and birds, such as the black grouse.

In the morning session the nine participants created artwork to create the prints. This was either by using a variety of templates, or by creating your own template based on a photograph to create a design, which was more challenging. The design was created by cutting out parts of the image and using layers of paper. In the afternoon session the printing was done, first using one colour and then for subsequent prints using additional colours. Turning the printing presses needed some muscle power, but it was good to see the results!



Rhos Street

The Rhos Street School site has now passed into new hands. The County Council has sold the site to social housing operator Adra. This marks the

end of an era.

What once stood as the educational heart of the community will soon make way for something altogether different:

much-needed social housing that the area has long required. Pragmatism has had to prevail over sentiment.

Yet there remains a sense of loss throughout the locale.

For many in the community, Rhos Street School was the backdrop to our collective formative years, the place where friendships were forged and childhood memories crystallised into something permanent.

Not just integral to the streetscape itself, it was integral to the lives of many in the community, thanks to their schooldays.

Across the road, however, a different kind of transformation is nearing completion. The conversion of Capel y Rhos, a project that has occupied the attention of planners and a developer for some time, is drawing to a conclusion. The detail remains tantalisingly unclear, though the planning application suggest the building's future lies as a café.

Change, it seems, is the only constant on Rhos Street.



The County Council no longer manages the site (or its vegetation)

Did you know...

... that rates of fatal illness fell during the Tudor period. This could have been sheer luck, as certain major diseases mutated into less virulent forms.

When a new form of the often lethal plaque arrived first in England in 1347 (the Black Death), it killed one third of the population, suddenly and catastrophically.

Its initial distribution was believed to be via fleas on black rats. It is understood that this plaque was carried to Ruthin by troops making their way from Chester to the port of Holyhead and heading for Ireland. The peak in Chester left 209 dead.

The number of deaths in the Lordship of Ruthin between March and September

1349 was put at 446. Ruthin was badly hit, also because the town was an important cloth centre.

Several parishes and communities disappeared completely as such and left behind few traces. Within the Lordship of Ruthin, one such was probably the parish of Dogfeiling (Dogg) (79 deaths).

There had been the plaque in Britain before and since but, by the start of the Tudor period, the outbreak became smaller and more people survived. ■ Information and text by Liz Williams



10 Years Ago...

When GHA Coaches collapsed in July 2016, it sent shock waves throughout North East Wales. The Ruabon-based operator, with a 30-vehicle garage on Lôn Parcwr, Ruthin, had spent nearly two decades quietly consolidating its position in the region. GHA simply vanished overnight. Fortunately, other contractors quickly stepped in to cover the school routes to Ysgol Brynhyfryd and elsewhere, preventing an even bigger crisis.

GHA was not a small player, with some 300 vehicles in total. It also maintained garages across Ruabon, Cheshire, and Shrewsbury.

In Ruthin, the GHA story started in earnest in 1998 with the takeover of the Ruthin - Mold bus service. Thereafter, GHA chipped away at Arriva's monopoly. From there, they methodically expanded their operations. In 2002, they acquired L E Roberts of Clawddnewydd t/a Cloion Coaches, bringing with it valuable local bus and school contracts.

Other competitors fell away. Clwydian Tours ceased coaching in 2007, followed

by Rogers of Ruthin at Graigfechan in 2013. GHA was thus able to seize the opportunity to expand still further.

By February 2016, five months before the collapse, they had taken over M & H Coaches' final Ruthin route, the 76 via Llandyrnog to Denbigh, cementing their total control of local bus services in and from the town.

By that time, GHA had become the undisputed master of transport across the region, operating services from Ruthin to Denbigh, Rhyl, Wrexham, Mold, Corwen, and the surrounding villages.



GHA Coaches at the Clwyd Gate

... and today

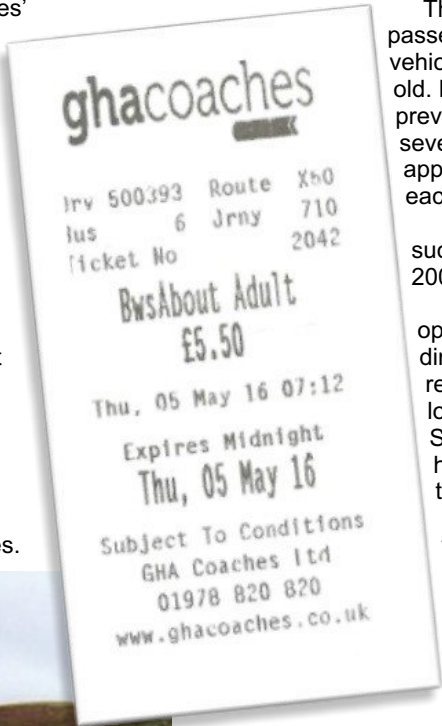
In a considerable investment, from May 2026 Transport for Wales has introduced eight brand new double deckers for the T51 (Rhyl - Wrexham via Denbigh and Ruthin).

They offer higher levels of passenger comfort and replace vehicles that were some 15 years old. Not that you'd know: the previous vehicles were retrimmed several years ago at a cost of approximately £10-£15,000 each.

The hourly T51 is the direct successor to GHA's X50/X51 of 2008 to 2016.

The T51 through Ruthin now operates hourly in both directions and TFW has reintroduced a Sunday service, lost in 2021. In fact, the Sunday service operates hourly (previously no more than every two hours).

The T51 investment is on top of the investment made in an hourly T8 (Corwen - Chester via Ruthin and Mold), which is also due to see upgraded vehicles with a higher seating capacity this year.



T51 at Ruthin

Souls of Stone: why Wales' and Ruthin's Chapels Matter

This spring, Ruthin held one of five sessions organised by the Capeli Cymru project

Wales' chapel heritage is crumbling. What was once the beating heart of Welsh spiritual and cultural life, the very building blocks that made every settlement distinctly Welsh, now faces an existential crisis. This is precisely why the Capeli Cymru project represents the most ambitious research initiative of its kind: to document, preserve and reimagine the future of Wales' most endangered architectural treasure.

The story begins in the 18th century, when Calvinistic Methodism swept through Wales with revolutionary fervour. In distinct ways to their typically English Wesleyan cousins, Welsh congregations embraced a distinctly non-conformist theology, one that demanded new buildings to match their spiritual ambitions and growth in adherents. Rather than Anglican altars, chapels showcased pulpits set against luminous windows.

By 1851, Wales was overwhelmingly non-conformist, with over 75 per cent

rejecting Anglican doctrine. Between 1800 and that same census year, Denbighshire alone witnessed the construction or reconstruction of 255 new and 74 rebuilt chapels.

The Victorian era supercharged this ecclesiastical revolution. The 1859 revival added 110,000 souls to congregations in Wales and sparked over 300 new or reconstructed chapels in just two years. Denbighshire contributed 29 new buildings and 20 renovations. Architects, now professionalised, abandoned rudimentary designs for something grander: classical styles adorned with Italianate flourishes, mildly Gothic influences, even art nouveau sensibilities.

Ruthin's Pendref chapel, designed by prolific architect Richard Owen, exemplified this ambition—an 800-seat auditorium in Lombardic Italianate style that cost £1,200 to construct. Between 1864 and 1903, Wales witnessed the building or rebuilding of 3,700 chapels. By 1905, an astonishing milestone was reached: chapel seats outnumbered the entire population of Wales.

These weren't merely places of worship. Chapels were community universities, concert halls and social

anchors. They taught and sustained the Welsh language, hosted concerts and tea parties, and provided congregational warmth in an increasingly industrial world.

Then came the collapse. Post-war secularism, Labour's ascendancy, and cultural shifts drained congregations with devastating speed. Of Wales' estimated 6,500 chapels, only 1,500 remain open and that number continues to fall. Hundreds close annually, leaving architectural orphans scattered across the landscape.

The Capeli Cymru project seeks to break this cycle. Through public engagement sessions, including gatherings in Ruthin, researchers are constructing a comprehensive register of Welsh places of worship while supporting open chapels in generating sustainable income. Crucially, the initiative gives congregations agency: exploring community ownership, asset transfers and preservation trusts rather than imposing top-down solutions. The goal is neither to freeze chapels in amber nor abandon them, but to help Wales reimagine these irreplaceable buildings for contemporary life while honouring their profound Christian heritage.

Illustrating Ruthin

I was last a resident of Ruthin back in 1987 when at the age of 23 I left home to begin a teaching career in central Cardiff. Fortunately, my parents remained in the town, affording me the opportunity to make regular visits back ever since.

I guess familiarity breeds contempt, as I clearly remember as teenagers how we were all desperate to escape and head for the bright city lights. The grass, however, is not always greener on the other side of the fence and it is only when you've been away that you realise what you're missing.

As a child I'd walk, run and cycle through Ruthin's streets and alleyways and not really take any notice of my surroundings. It's only later that I've come to realise what a real gem of a place Ruthin is. The town is made up of a rich tapestry of buildings. These are not set out to any formal plan or design, something that you might see in some grand city centres. More, the buildings here are squeezed in, crowding up and around the low sandstone hills that terminate at the end of the Vale of Clwyd. Over time one building has replaced another. Alterations have been made and we've ended up with a wide range of building styles, materials and colours that make Ruthin what it is today, an architects paradise. It's a rather cool place for artists too! Add to this the stunning background of the Clwydian Hills and you have a real winner.

Tourists and visitors just look and admire. I'm sure they see far more in the

place than most residents. Just stand at the bottom of Record Street

where it branches off from Well Street and look up at the roofline. The view has such a wonderful collection of assorted chimneys.

I began to notice Ruthin as a subject for my drawings and paintings after I'd left the town. During my return visits home, I would start to turn my observations into drawings and paintings of the place. My ability to draw and paint hasn't come from any training in school. In fact, I don't remember doing any art at Brynhyfryd while there. I have, however, always spent a great deal of my free time filling up sketchbooks and this is something that I started well before secondary school.

My only real training came while I was at college. In my second year, I found my way to the art department, and I've been seriously passionate about making illustrations ever since. Over time, I've developed quite an individual style. I use water colour pencils and pastels together with ink to create very bright almost cartoon-like images. Town and seascapes are absolutely my favourite subjects, and Ruthin has become a much loved location because of the variety of buildings on offer.

Back in January 2025, I received a



request asking if an image I had produced of St Peter's Square could be used for some new public information panels. These are to be sighted on the square after the completion of work resulting from Levelling Up funding that the town received from the UK Government. Naturally, I was really thrilled and honoured to be recognised, and this set my mind to bringing a collection of my original artwork together to exhibit in the town for the first time. Last summer I managed to secure the Old Courthouse on the Square as a venue and since then I've been bringing together a collection which will include work that I've completed over the years, together with a range of new images that I have produced just for this show. To support the exhibition, I'll also bring a range of my sketchbooks which will compliment and enrich the framed paintings and illustrations. Some of the original work will be for sale, together with a range of prints and cards. Pop in to meet the artist.

■ Illustrating Ruthin: a free exhibition at The Old Courthouse by Artist Martin Kaye: 12th - 19th July 2026 11am to 5pm, at The Old Courthouse.

When Mother Church Must Let Go

The Anglican Mission Area and Diocese of St Asaph stands at a crossroads with St Meugan's in Llanrhydd, Ruthin's cherished 'mother church'. Though the building sits technically beyond the town's boundary, it occupies a far more significant place in the town's collective identity, a position that makes its future all the more fraught with meaning.

The church's closure came quietly, with what some felt was less genuine consultation and more fait accompli. Truth be told, the numbers told their own story: a dozen souls on a typical Sunday, each one a reminder that the congregation had long since stopped sustaining itself. The building, by contrast, demanded constant feeding: maintenance bills, structural repairs, the endless appetite of grade I listed-building stewardship.

Once, there was hopeful talk of the Friends of Friendless Churches stepping in as saviour. These conversations proceeded to an advanced stage, suggesting a genuine possibility. Yet salvation, it turned out, came with rather stringent conditions: the Friends could preserve the building, but they could not marry people within it. For a church, even a failing one, this limitation rather misses the point. More pointedly, they required the church to be in good condition before taking it on.

The Diocese has since developed a systematic framework for unsustainable churches, a less clumsy term than 'toolkit', of which St Meugan's is one of five pilots. The purpose is admirably transparent: to listen to parishioners and the wider community before deciding the church's fate.

But therein lies a complication. There simply is no community surrounding St Meugan's.

The options being considered are varied and each carries its own peculiar weight. The Friends of Friendless Churches offer long-term preservation and heritage protection, yet require a building in good condition and cannot accommodate marriages. A heritage centre or community use might engage local schools and educational interests,



though such engagement tends to flicker rather than sustain.

The possibility of secular weddings in a deconsecrated church presents a curious prospect: couples with no faith seeking the aesthetic and emotional resonance of a 'church' setting and even pagans wanting stone and history for their vows. There is a peculiar irony here: the building might become exactly what modern consumers demand, a backdrop and relic repurposed for occasions its builders never imagined.

Alternatively, the church might be sold, which would bring financial relief while the Grade I listing and additional diocesan restrictions would guarantee heritage safeguards. Finally, there remains the option of maintaining it as a so-called pilgrim church, a site of contemplative spiritual visitation with half-a-dozen services a year, though this path has been largely ruled out. The Mission Area would struggle to maintain it and in all honesty would prefer to concentrate on its Christian communities where there are people.

St Meugan's carries more than stones and mortar. The church bears a meaningful connection to the famous Thelwall family, a detail that lends historical gravitas to what might otherwise appear as merely another redundant rural church. Local schools have expressed interest, and the building remains historically significant to Ruthin's sense of itself.

The Diocese faces a blunt reality: all 12 churches in the Mission Area are Grade I or II listed and all require significant funding for essential works (St Peter's aside). St Meugan's is deteriorating inside, with no running water let alone lavatories. The Diocese's

coffers have been substantially emptied by the transformation of St Peter's. There simply isn't money left for a building that no longer serves a worshipping community. The Mission Area must prioritise people, not preservation for its own sake.

A pilgrim church sounds romantic in principle. In practice, it becomes a drain on resources that should flow toward genuine pastoral work and Christian outreach. Concentrating effort where congregations actually gather, rather than where they once gathered, is not abandonment. It is stewardship. The maintenance burden is simply too great, and it deflects management time from the Diocese's true purpose: Christian worship, pastoral work and outreach.

Here is where sentiment and reality meet with some grace: the building remains safe and is opened during warmer months for those seeking solitude and peace. Though in limbo, St Meugan's has not been left to rot. It is accessible to the curious and the contemplative. This is no small thing. The possibility of wedding income has been considered and largely dismissed: the numbers probably won't justify the commitment. Yet should secular weddings come to pass, the Diocese would ensure protections through its Grade I listing and additional restrictions upon sale, preserving what can be preserved when doctrine must yield to pragmatism.

The decision has not yet been reached. The framework consultation continues. St Meugan's remains open, waiting, caught between its past as a mother church and whatever future awaits.

Perhaps that in-between space is the most honest position of all: neither fully alive nor finally closed, but genuinely uncertain, like so many Christian institutions in modern Britain.



This memorial tablet has transferred from Capel Bathafarn to St Meugan's

Book launch: St Elidan's Church and the village of Llanelidan



On Thursday May 7th, Andrew Sumner launched his book 'St Elidan's Church and the village of Llanelidan' in the village church. Andrew is a retired chartered landscape architect, with a keen interest in history, who has lived on the edge of the parish for over 30 years. He has also been the church treasurer and a member of the congregation of St Elidan's Church for many years. In his professional life, he has undertaken projects to help

conserve historically important buildings, settlements, landscapes and gardens in the UK, Ireland and Europe.

His book is an historical and interpretive guide to St Elidan's Church and the village/parish of Llanelidan, published by the 'Friends of Saint Elidan' community group. It combines local history, landscape interpretation, and a practical tour of the church and its grounds.

The book places Llanelidan within

deep time, from Ice Age landscape formation and glacial lakes through the Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and mediæval periods, blending research with local evidence (e.g. barrows, cropmarks, routes and coin finds). The narrative then follows the evolution of Christianity, the 'Age of Saints', sacred springs and the complex identity of Saint Elidan.

The book also provides a 'Quick Guide' for visitors, describing features outside and inside the church (e.g., the lychgate, porch, yews, pulpit and monuments). Later chapters cover mediæval and post-mediæval settlement, the marcher lords, Reformation impacts, church restorations, and the evolving shape of the llan/churchyard, concluding with local stories and a timeline of incumbents.

Books cost £12.00 each.

Books are available to purchase at St Elidan's Pilgrim Church (LL15 2PT), at Pwllglas village shop, or by emailing Andrew at apcs.cilan@outlook.com. Postage, if required, is £3.50.

All purchases go towards the 'Friends of Saint Elidan' community group, who care for the churchyard, organise fundraising events and maintain a presence in the pilgrim church of St Elidan.

■ My experience of local books is that you need to buy them while you see them, without undue hesitation. Once they've sold out, it's usually way too late. Reprints are few and far between—Ed

Central Square Social

A new all-day social venue is soon to launch in the town centre, aimed at breathing fresh life into a building that has stood empty for years. The people behind the new Central Square Social say they will offer a dynamic space where residents can gather from morning coffee through late-evening entertainment.

The venue, once occupied by Majestic Travel and Choo Choo, is poised to benefit from the multi-million pound investment in public money that is currently transforming St Peter's Square. Along with the much-anticipated refurbishment of another long-standing 'empty' at the Myddleton Arms, we are beginning to see new life on the Square, which has seen casualties over recent years.

The venue is anticipated to combine

a relaxed daytime café with vibrant evening hospitality, it's reported, creating what its proprietor describes as 'a community hub where people can start their day with great coffee, enjoy quality food, watch sports with friends, and experience live entertainment at night.'

From morning onwards, the venue will operate as a coffee and sandwich bar, serving freshly brewed coffee and speciality drinks, sandwiches, light bites, and fresh cakes and baked goods.

As daylight fades, Central Square Social will aim to transform into an evening entertainment destination. The cocktail bar will feature a 'curated drinks menu', while guests can enjoy live music, comedy on selected weekends,



and major sporting events shown live.

Operating from morning until late, the owners suggest that the venue adapts throughout the day, shifting seamlessly from daytime café to evening social destination. The proprietor emphasises inclusivity and community at its heart.

Cymdeithas Ddinesig Rhuthun a’r Cylch (CDdRAC)

Tanysgriafiad Aelodaeth Blynnyddol (1af Medi I 31ain Awst) - Unigolyn: £10 Dau/Teulu: £15

(1) Teitl:..... Enw Cyfenw:

(2) Teitl:..... Enw Cyfenw:

Cyfeiriad: Côd Post:.....

Ffôn: Ebost:

Rwyf/Rydym yn dymuno ymuno â CDRAC – Ticiwch/dileu’r canlynol yn ôl yr angen: ☐

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Rwyf/Rydym wedi sefydlu archeb sefydlog flynyddol o £10/£15 ar gyfer y blynnyddoedd i ddod yn ddaladwy ar Medi 1af bob blwyddyn..... ☐

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NEU: Rwyf/Rydym yn amgau siec (neu arian parod) am £10/£15 yn daladwy I Cymdeithas Ddinesig Rhuthun

A’r Cylch – anfoner i:

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Cymorth Rhodd/Giftaid eich taliad (dewisol)

Rwyf/Rydym yn talu treth y DU ac yn dymuno i’r taliad ac unrhyw daliad a wneir yn y blyn ddoedd I ddod neu a wnaed yn y 4 blynedd diwethaf fod yn *Gymorth Rhodd*. Rwyf/Rydym yn deall os byddaf/byddwn yn talu llai o Dreth Incwm a/neu Dreth Enillion Cyfalaf na swm y *Cymorth Rhodd* a hawliwyd yn y flwyddyn honno, mai fy nghyfrifoldeb I/ni yw talu unrhyw wahaniaeth. ☐

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Fran's Four Decades of Leather

Peter Daniels seeks out Hide Away as it celebrates 40 years of trading in Ruthin

When Fran Smyth moved into the rear of her current premises in 1986, she brought with her a few years of self-taught expertise and a passion for creating beautiful, lasting things.

Her journey in craftsmanship began as a teenager with a Saturday job, supplemented by her own relentless experimentation. Fran freely admits that trial and error were her best teachers. Even now, four decades on, she continues to push creative boundaries, experimenting with new techniques and tackling bespoke commissions that challenge her considerable skills. Most famously, she crafted the infamous scotch caps once used on prisoners, now displayed at The Old Gaol, a project she describes as genuinely demanding.

Her signature pieces showcase the hallmark of true craftsmanship: dog collars, belts, bespoke bags and knife sheaths, all hand-stitched in the traditional manner using heavy, moulded leather. This is now a rarity in the modern UK. Her personal favourite is a circular tool bag she created for the Bugatti Touring Club, a piece that embodies the precision and artistry she brings to every commission.

One particularly memorable order was a 78-inch belt for the wrestler Giant Haystacks, a reminder of her business' broader 'reach' over the years!

In her early years, Fran was forced to chase sales wherever the money took her, travelling to high-quality craft and design fairs across the south east of England and events such as the Royal Welsh. She would leave promotional leaflets for Ruthin wherever she ventured, determined to put the town on the map. This nomadic period sustained her business through lean times. Whenever bills loomed, she would simply pack up and head to the next fair.



A turning point came when Fran realised that 'small is beautiful'. She now manages comfortably with her shop, her existing clients, and word-of-mouth referrals. In an era when skilled leather workers have become virtually extinct, her loyal clientele tends to return again and again, understanding that her creations are designed for longevity rather than the throwaway culture that dominates modern commerce.

Today, Fran faces a peculiar challenge: her products are the complete antithesis of obsolescence, yet sourcing the materials has become increasingly difficult. Leather suppliers are closing, forcing her to source leather from Europe and the States. She refuses to embrace online sales or social media marketing, preferring to keep life manageable and maintain her craft's integrity.

This philosophy reduces pressure but also limits her reach, and she supplements local sales through a retailer in Llangollen.

Over four decades, Fran has witnessed Ruthin's transformation... and decline. The town is far quieter now than it was in the 1980s when for example Americans considered Ruthin to be on the tourist circuit. Covid and the internet have altered the rhythm of her business, though not in ways that particularly trouble her. She remains fully employed, with seasonal ebbs and flows. Summer brings tourists, while Christmas reverses the ratio back to locals.

There is no succession plan, nor does Fran feel there needs to be. She occupies a comfortable position doing what she loves. A business of this nature (bespoke, labour-intensive, uncompromising in quality) simply wouldn't be sustainable for a younger person, particularly one with family responsibilities.

Yet one thing has warmed her heart across these forty years: watching children who once wandered into her shop return as adults, maintaining their connection to her craft and her Ruthin.



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

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