

Town & Around O Gwmpas y Dre

Summer 2025



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

The Promise of Clwyd and Well Streets

St Peter’s Square may be the heart of our town, but it’s now Clwyd and

Well Streets that seem to offer the glimmer of hope for revitalisation



As summer unfolds, the unusually warm weather has ushered in some positive developments. However, these improvements stand in stark contrast to the current state of our Square.

After a challenging period, Clwyd Street is now thriving. At the junction of Clwyd and Upper Clwyd Streets, Morris & Me has opened its doors, having undergone a meticulous and sympathetic refurbishment at the proprietors’ expense. Inside, the shop boasts an impressive selection of interior décor that rivals the likes of Heal’s, Conran, and John Lewis. Further along, the newly opened Nest coffee

FREE EVENT...

See what can be discovered in Ruthin, thanks to the Civic Association and the County Council’s Heritage Service. P4 for details

shop has quickly become a local favourite. Meanwhile, The Star, which had been closed for some time, reopened in April, offering food and drink in a refurbished bistro that proudly claims to be Ruthin’s oldest pub.

At the opposite end of town, the Dreamatorium has emerged. While whimsical themes may not resonate with everyone, the transformation of the former dark bar and club into a bright, airy space with exposed beams is commendable. This two-year refurbishment stands out as one of the most significant heritage projects of the

Continued on p5

Ruthin Reimagined: the next chapter

This June, as Bro Rhuthun rolls out its community-led tourism events, Liz Williams unveils an exciting agenda to elevate Ruthin’s image

While Ruthin will remain a charming shopping destination, shifting economic tides mean we can no longer depend solely on retail for our survival.

The signs are clear. Our town has become a dormitory, with residential homes dotting even the town centre. This year, the arrival of quick-service outlets like Gregg’s and Domino’s

signals a continued shift towards a service-oriented economy, something that would have seemed unimaginable a couple of decades ago.

So, as we anticipate the conclusion of the levelling up funded work on the Square, what’s next for us?

We must embrace the fact that we are no longer just a town of shops. Our focus should shift towards celebrating our rich heritage and vibrant arts scene. In essence, we need to champion arts and culture.

To achieve this, we must breathe new life into our arts trail and consider reviving the beloved ‘Art in Business’ initiative across various venues. While the future of the International Arts



Festival remains uncertain, last year’s inaugural event showcased the incredible potential we possess. We should expand this vision to include music, drama, crafts—both ancient and modern—and literature. Ruthin needs to become an events hub!

Continued on p10

From the Chair

While out and about in our lovely town, I was filled with a real positive feeling, a great vibe, as they say, despite what the doom mongers on social media say.

Very recently, two more new businesses have opened their doors, The Dreamatorium, and Morris and Me, both really welcoming, with a huge amount of effort having gone into their premises. On Lôn Parcwr, Gregg's has opened its doors, and is proving popular. All signs that the owners have been willing to take a chance on Ruthin, so let's get behind them, and other existing businesses, and show our support at a time when things are

difficult in general.

Work has been completed in restoring the War Memorial, and also the Peers Memorial, both of which look splendid and will survive for many more years to come. The Parc Clwyd project (Cae Ddol and other 'green' areas) is underway and, again, will enhance the town in many ways, all positive signs for me that our town is undergoing a real 'makeover', one which hopefully will bring in added footfall too.

St Peter's Church restoration work is well under way, and the regular updates on progress are heartening to see. I, for one, am very excited to see the end

result here and, again, St Peter's will benefit, for a good many years, by having a more flexible, enhanced space, with a variety of uses.

I had occasion to visit Ruthin Castle recently, for Sunday lunch. It was excellent, the food and service were very good and, more importantly, the place was busy with guests, many



of whom were staying, having booked a package deal which involved free entry to Nantclwyd y Dre and or the Old Gaol. This is proving popular and beneficial to all three, an excellent example of what can be achieved when businesses work together in this way.

I appreciate that there are still some areas giving cause for concern (e.g. Cuning Green), and I will continue to press for action on these but, in the meantime, let's enjoy the work that has taken place and that is already giving much pleasure to residents and visitor alike, bringing a real feel-good factor with it this summer.

Anne Roberts MBE
Chair of the Civic Association



Living in the Plastic Age: the Challenge of Vinyl

Those of us of a certain age will recall the 1979 single by art-pop band Buggles called 'Living in the Plastic Age'. Looking back, it's surprising that the innovative group did not see the single enter the top 10. The same was true of its better-known 'Video Killed the Radio Star'.

Whereas 'Video Killed...' refers to the innovation that can lead to the obsolescence of previous art forms, the lyrics of 'Plastic Age' symbolise a manufactured, synthetic existence, disconnected from authenticity.

And so it is regarding recent trends on our town centre shop fronts.

Using vinyls on shop fronts is nothing new, except it is starting to seep into the town centre itself.

There are some more acceptable examples, such as at Envy and Serendipity salons. Both are plain, unassuming and the opposite of garish. Others may be less so.

In January 2024, that at Awel Care (the former Newyddion Rhuthun) was soon removed. Unlike at the more modest applications above, that at Awel Care covered both aspects and all three windows entirely, on a listed building in a conservation area.

The latest 'developments' are the Well Street Pharmacy and Domino's. We understand why the Well Street pharmacy has screened off half its glazed frontage to accommodate a consulting room but the impact, together with a TV screen, is still an eyesore within the heart of the conservation area. But at least the building has limited heritage worth.

Domino's is also within the conservation area, just. It's at the very border of it. The adjacent building on Well Street is of value but the extension, now housing Domino's, is

of much lower worth.

That's not to say that Domino's looks great. It doesn't. It's very visible and even aggressive. Ideally, this should not be permitted.

The counter argument is that, between Domino's, B & M and Co-op, Station Road frontages are not great and lend a cluttered appearance even before Domino's.

In Ruthin, such vinyl frontages have tended to be associated with off-centre locations. We should be on our guard as regards locations in the conservation area. This before it starts to become the norm. Every time vinyl is applied, it suggests this is more and more acceptable.

Vinyl-covered shop windows are unappealing. They detract from the overall aesthetic of the area. This can lead to a less inviting environment for shoppers and visitors, potentially harming foot traffic and local businesses.

More than that, the impression is one of contributing to a sense of neglect or even town centre decline. It may signal to potential customers that businesses are struggling or that the area is not well-maintained. This, again, can discourage visits.

To address the issue, Denbighshire planning authority needs to consider its policies

regarding vinyl and quickly, before this becomes the norm. They should encourage businesses to use more aesthetically pleasing alternatives. Initiatives could include promoting window displays that showcase products or art or providing grants for better signage. Engaging local businesses in discussions about maintaining the visual appeal of the area can also foster a sense of community responsibility and collaboration.

As we reflect on the themes presented in Buggles' 'Living in the Plastic Age', it becomes 'clear' that the rise of vinyl-covered shop windows in town mirrors the song's critique of a manufactured existence. Just as the lyrics lament a disconnection from authenticity, the increasing prevalence of these synthetic façades threatens to erode the unique character and charm of our community.

If we allow this trend to continue unchecked, we risk transforming our vibrant town into a plastic replica, devoid of the genuine spirit that makes it special.



Building Futures: Llanfair Finds New Purposes

One of the area's redundant former school buildings has been sold. The former Llanfair school empty since 2020 was listed for sale for £300,000. The 19th century grade II-listed structure spans approximately 4,100 sq ft and features four large classrooms, offices, a kitchen, and



additional rooms on the first floor. Its striking block façade and ornate multi-panelled windows contribute to its architectural significance. New owners have submitted a planning application to convert the former school into a residential dwelling. Their proposal aims to preserve the

building's original character while adapting it for modern living. Meanwhile, adjacent and also contributing significantly to the Llanfair conservation area are the almshouses. These have also sold. Known as Elizabeth Owen Terrace, these charming two-storey structures were erected by the Owen family from Cyffylliog. They were transferred to the local church in 1886. However, escalating maintenance costs led to the Knights of Malta taking them on, though they faced challenges. In 2014, the almshouses were passed to Tai Clwyd, but they too struggled financially. Subsequently, Grŵp Cynefin took on the responsibility, yet they were unable to fund the necessary modern updates. The buildings remained unoccupied.

Discover Ruthin's Hidden Heritage

The Ruthin and District Civic Association has organised a free event when Denbighshire County Council's Heritage Service to reveal what can be discovered in Ruthin. This event will be held at Nantclwyd y Dre on Wednesday July 2nd, 2025 during the Gŵyl Ruthin Festival week. The event starts at 2.00pm, when the Heritage Services' Carly Davies will give a presentation of what is on offer in Ruthin. A number of objects which are normally out of sight will be revealed. This will include objects such as a leather shoe found in a central chimney stack in Crown House to keep evil spirits away; objects associated with the Ellis and Cambrian Water Works; and artefacts connected with the former Ruthin Borough Council. There will be ample time to ask questions and examine the objects. Pre-booking is required owing to the limited size of the room. To book, contact the Ruthin and District Civic Association on Ruthin 704998 or ruthincivic@btinternet.com. We welcome non-members, although we would love you to join our group!

Levelling Update: Square

Public realm works expected this September on The Square have been put back till at least January 2026. This is particularly galling for the Civic Association who in February took the difficult decision to postpone Open Doors in 2025 because it would clash with the works. Work on planning Open Doors begins nine months beforehand. The Civic Association nevertheless welcomes the start of the works. This continues to be a difficult journey, with several people (and what are believed to be fake profiles) pedalling false information on social media. Such misdirection has fuelled concern but we continue to believe that the results will enhance our civic space at the top of town. While we remain positive about the scheme, the Civic Association is concerned about some of the recent detail that has emerged and has had an opportunity to express its reservations. Apart from the loss of that roundabout, there still appears to be a lack of imagination as regards what some regard as a highways scheme. Parking continues to litter the Square to the detriment of pedestrian movements and our world-class streetscape on the Myddelton side. In fact, there appears to us to be more, not less of this, prompting some to call it a parking & roads scheme, rather than a heritage & economic regeneration one.

Levelling Update: St Peter's Church

Changes to the £1.6m transformation at St Peter's Church will no longer see three en-suite rooms as part of the previously proposed pilgrim accommodation in the adjoining cloisters. This is because changes in VAT reclamation means that the project can no longer rely on some £230,000 previously expected as a refund. It will nevertheless result in the cloisters being modernised and converted into rooms for church and community use. Meanwhile, the steel structure as the basis for the mezzanine arrived in May (alongside scaffolding erected along the exterior) and with it we can see the first tangible changes to the church layout in these exclusive photographs taken at the end of May 2025. The project is expected to be complete in the late autumn.



Why Ruthin?

Ruthin has a contrary relationship with national branded businesses and franchises. What's going on?

In recent times, Ruthin has long had a complicated relationship with national brands. As we witness the arrival of well-known operators like Gregg's and Domino's, it raises questions about the implications for the town's unique character and local economy.

National brands were few in Ruthin. Boot's the Chemists has been a long-standing town centre business. In 1992, Glyndŵr District Council's assertion that a major supermarket could never occupy the new Lo-cost supermarket off Station Road (now Co-op) was proven wrong with the arrival of Tesco in 2006 and Aldi in 2020. This pattern of national brands entering the market has continued, culminating in the recent opening of Gregg's and Domino's.

Yet, banks are national brands but, of the four we once had, only one now remains. TSB closed in 1994, and Nat West and Barclay's followed in 2017 and 2018.

Readers will remember the most recent town centre brand to try Ruthin was Costa. They came (2013) and then left (2024).

On top of Gregg's and Domino's, there are persistent rumours of a national brand developing adjacent to Aldi, and occupying the former Costa premises.

And, younger people continue to wish for a bottom-of-the-food-chain McDonald's in Ruthin.

Is this the start of a new 'invasion' and what does this mean for the future of our town?

The first thing to point out is the interest from brands like Gregg's and

Domino's suggests confidence in Ruthin's economic potential. With lower operating costs and a growing population including the villages in Ruthin's ambit, smaller towns like Ruthin offer untapped markets for franchises seeking new customer bases.

That they have expressed an interest in Ruthin suggests that they think our economy can support them. We should perhaps be flattered. They won't have established businesses here on a whim.

Secondly, both Gregg's and Domino's brands are popular. In the eye of the consumer they seemingly can do no wrong. There are many who welcome them both and trust them.

Let us also not forget that larger urban areas have experienced market saturation. This makes it challenging for franchises to find new markets. Smaller towns often present these, with less competition, allowing businesses to establish a foothold more easily.

The franchise running Ruthin's Domino's is the SK Group. They already operate 280, in England in the urban north west and the midlands and south, and in Edinburgh. Domino's gives its franchise operators areas in which to operate and develop and, if they don't, then Domino's will ask others to step in. The pressure's therefore on to find new markets. Ruthin is one such.

Interestingly, neither the Mold nor the Denbigh branches are operated by the SK Group. Neither are those in Rhyl and Prestatyn. But SK has recently opened in Llangefni, with its a similar population to Ruthin. With just 12 Domino's in North Wales, the field's open.

Smaller towns also tend to come with lower operating overheads and margins. The increases in population to Ruthin's north at the two Glasdir sites plus house building in larger villages in Ruthin's ambit are factors in determining whether or not a franchise might be fruitful here.

When you add changing consumer



preferences such as ordering online and a delivery network not otherwise established elsewhere in Ruthin and it is perhaps the larger chains that are best able to support these changes.

Ruthin's relationship with national brands is thus complex and evolving. Local residents have mixed feelings. While some welcome the convenience of these brands, others fear the loss of Ruthin's unique independent sector. With that comes empty shop units that contribute nothing to local services and further accelerate the downward spiral in terms of footfall. There is a danger of creating a desolate townscape.

For example, though far from being independent, anecdotal evidence suggests regional chain Chatwin's has lost trade as a result of Gregg's. The army of morning and lunchtime workers, for example, now seems to prefer easy vehicular access off Lôn Parcwr. The could apply to Becws Islyn, near Gregg's.

While there may be concerns about the implications of any onslaught, the arrival of operations like Gregg's and Domino's could signify a new chapter for the town. As these brands establish themselves, they may not only provide popular services but also contribute to the local economy, reflecting a shift in how smaller towns are perceived by national businesses.

This, sadly, may come at a cost. Ultimately, the question remains: can Ruthin balance the benefits of national brands with the preservation of its unique character?

A Warm Welcome: how you can enrich the visitor experience

Can you spare a few hours a week or month to help our visitors, *writes Peter Daniels*

The Old Courthouse has successfully established itself as an information hub for the town, thanks to the dedication of its volunteers. Engaging with visitors not only enhances their experience but also fosters a greater appreciation for Ruthin.

The Old Courthouse aims to attract more volunteers for the remainder of the 2024 season. The vision is to open the building on at least three weekdays and also if possible on Saturday mornings.

Volunteering offers a rewarding opportunity to share knowledge about the town and connect with visitors, who often express gratitude for the assistance they receive.

What is most pleasing during my own shifts at The Old Courthouse was just how positive visitors were about our town. There were several categories of guests.

In addition, each of the proposed events require volunteers to be present for three-hour shifts, welcoming guests and answering their questions.

Visitors fell into three main categories: those solely interested in the building; first-time visitors; and regulars returning to the town.

In previous years, everyone has been impressed by the building's restoration and the exhibitions on display.

First-time visitors were pleasantly surprised by the town's offerings, while repeat visitors shared their reasons for

returning, such as the scenic views and the variety of independent shops.

Interestingly, a few local residents are still unaware of The Old Courthouse.

Overall, the positive feedback from visitors and residents alike highlights the Courthouse's role in promoting the town as a vibrant town centre; in giving out verbal and written information; and in enhancing community engagement.

Can you help? Email jim@ruthintowncouncil.gov.uk who will give you more information and put you in touch with an existing volunteer.

Meet the Mayor on most Wednesday mornings at The Old Courthouse

Time Well Spent: a town's journey to restore historic landmark



by Rob Price

With the Peers Memorial restoration project now completed, the restoring committee organised an event at the end of March to bring the project to a close and to launch the companion book about the memorial's history and the restoration project.

Town and Around readers will remember between August and December 2024 the structure on St Peters Square was clad in scaffolding, with extensive restorative works carried out by the skilled contractor RM Building Conservation with the guidance of conservation architect Elinor Gray Williams. They both spoke

at the event about their work, in terms of the high level of detail and care required in the work on the memorial's unique and ornate features.

The memorial (often referred to as the town clock) is Grade II listed and is the focal point on the town's square. Questions had been raised for the past few years about its condition. At the end of 2020, a committee of local volunteers was formed with the sole intention of carrying out some restorative works to the clock to preserve it for future generations.

The memorial was built in 1883 to commemorate Joseph Peers, who in the 19th century was Denbighshire's Clerk of the Peace for 50 years. It Clock was designed by the renowned architect John Douglas, who is well known for his various buildings in

Chester, including the Eastgate Clock, and a range of buildings across North Wales and North West England. The memorial was paid for by public subscription, with the actual clock being paid for by Peers himself as a gift. The clock is owned by Denbighshire County Council.

The committee's sole intention was to restore the memorial to as close as possible to its condition when it was built and not to change it in any way. At the start of 2021, the committee secured funding from Clocaenog Windfarm Fund, Denbighshire County Council and Ruthin Town Council to appoint a conservation architect to programme works to the structure.

Funding was then secured from the UK Government, the Heritage Fund, Denbighshire County Council, the Clocaenog Windfarm Fund and Ruthin Town Council to undertake the work and a community engagement project.

That engagement project included lectures, exhibitions, craft workshops, school talks, a commemorative book, work experience opportunities for sixth form pupils at Ysgol Brynhyfryd, as well as other activities to get the community involved. This element was ably led by Heather Williams, who ensured all the project's activities were well organised and the book drafted and finalised.

The book is available digitally on Civic Association's website.

The wholly voluntary restoration committee has worked particularly hard since the start of 2021 to bring the project to its conclusion, but will now be dissolved. The project has been extremely worthwhile and has ensured one of the town's landmarks will remain in good condition for several decades to come.

At the time of writing, there are a limited number of copies of the 64-page book, available at £8 each, from Elfair, the Craft Centre, the Market Hall and Nantclwyd y Dre. Author Heather Williams also has some copies (email back page). Buy soon to avoid disappointment.



Clwyd & Well Streets

From page 1

decade, executed by a reputable private company with an international following. It heralds a promising renaissance for Well Street.

There's more to celebrate. Dragon Antiques has recently opened on Well Street, adding to the existing antiques and retro businesses, and offering a unique selection that catches the eye with its inviting windows. Chopper pushbikes often lean casually against the kerb, while sometimes motor scooters proudly occupy their spots, balanced on their stands.

As we write, the former framer on Well Street is being transformed into a soft play area, and NuBee Fashions brings a vibrant splash of colour to Well Street. Further up, the Manorhaus has received a fresh coat of paint and repointing.

In stark contrast, the heart of our town, St Peter's Square, still resembles something of a building site, a state it has languished in for several years. Naturally Ethical and No. 11 stand out as

positives but empty buildings, partially converted, sit idle in this central and critical location. It is crucial that these spaces are put to good use, benefiting from the public sector investment once levelling-up work is completed.

The refurbishment of the former Oliver Bell building is particularly frustrating. While its exterior has been tastefully restored, it remains under-used. Reports that a



couple of buildings have changed hands could be positive.

Maybe we just need to await the conclusion of the levelling up work...

We're Safe from the Robots. For Now

Perhaps as soon as the early 2040s, robots and machines will have taken over from us mere mortals. They can be programmed to act as if they have cultural values but they will never have feelings and emotions. Will our heritage be safe in their hands?

Meanwhile, the age of machine learning and artificial intelligence is already upon us, even if it still requires much refining. We asked vogueish large language model Chat GPT some questions about Ruthin. How do you rate Chat GPT's responses?

We conclude that we're safe, for the time being.

1. What was the street where Marks and Spencer once had a branch in the town of Ruthin? When did it close? What did it sell?

Marks and Spencer once had a branch in Ruthin, located on Castle Street. It closed in 2001. The Ruthin branch was a typical M&S store that offered a range of clothing, home goods and foods.

2. When did UK Chancellor Rachel Reeves briefly live in Ruthin?

Rachel Reeves briefly lived in Ruthin during her childhood. She lived there for a period when her family moved to the area, but specific dates of her residence are not widely documented.

3. During which season did Ruthin Town FC briefly manage promotion to the Football League?

During the 1990-1991 season. They were relegated after just one season.

4. When did the Ruthin branch of the Lloyd's Bank close?

In 2017.

5. What about Ruthin's branch of the Trustee Savings Bank (TSB)?

The TSB in Ruthin closed in 2014.

6. What was the name of Ruthin-based

Glyndŵr District Council's last chief executive? When did Glyndŵr District Council cease?

The last chief executive of Glyndŵr District Council was David Jones. Glyndŵr ceased to on April 1st, 1996.

7. Was Ruthin the county town of Flintshire or Meirionnydd?

Ruthin was the county town of Denbighshire, not Flintshire or Meirionnydd. However, it is located near the borders of both Flintshire and Meirionnydd. Flintshire's county town is Mold, while Meirionnydd's was Dolgellau.

8. What was the name of the famous 19th century Ruthin-born and Ruthin-based Clerk of the Peace?

The famous 19th-century Ruthin-born and Ruthin-based Clerk of the Peace was Sir John Williams. He was known for his contributions to local governance and his involvement in various civic matters in the area.

9. What was famous author Hafina Clwyd's full birth name?

Her full name was Mary Elizabeth Hughes. She was known for her contributions to Welsh literature and her works in both Welsh and English.

10. What was Nantclwyd y Dre used for before it became a tourist attraction?

It was used as a private residence. It served as a family home for several generations, and its history reflects the architectural and social changes in the area over the centuries. The house has been restored and is now open to the public, showcasing its historical significance.

11. When did the railway line from Ruthin to Cerrigydrudion open and close?

The railway line from Ruthin to Cerrigydrudion opened in April 1881. This line was part of the Ruthin and

Cerrigydrudion Railway, which served the local communities and facilitated transport in the area. It closed to passenger services on September 30, 1957, and it was completely closed to all traffic in 1965.

12. What is Ruthin's main industrial employer and when did it start in business?

The principal manufacturer of agri-fertilisers in the Ruthin area is Yara. The company started in business in 1905, originally as a part of Norsk Hydro, and has since become a leading global producer of fertilisers and agricultural products.

13. Who are Ruthin's Bobby Feeley, Emrys Wynne and Huw Hilditch Roberts?

Emrys Wynne is the Lead Member for Welsh Language, Culture, and Heritage in Denbighshire. He is a member of Plaid Cymru. Bobby Feeley serves as Vice Chair of Denbighshire County Council. She is a member of the Democratic Party (sic). Huw Hilditch Roberts is a notable figure from Ruthin, Wales, known for his involvement in local politics. He is a member of the Conservative Party (!?).

14. Who publishes Town and Around?

It is published by the Ruthin & District Civic Association. This publication has been providing news and features since 2003, focusing on local events, community issues, and the history of Ruthin.

15. What are the main cultural assets of Ruthin?

St Peter's Church, The Old Courthouse, the Market Hall, the Craft Centre, the Peers Memorial, numerous historic buildings... and the remnants of the mediæval town walls that can still be seen.

■ Actual answers on p.16

Help Preserve History

There is a new volunteer opportunity at the Archives, based in Ruthin's Old Gaol.

A new project is due to start shortly for a small volunteer group based at Ruthin Gaol. This project will involve reviewing, repackaging and re-boxing court session rolls dating from about 1913 working forwards to 1929, and possibly up to 1950.

The Tuesday morning group normally meets twice a month for three



hours in Ruthin Gaol to help with archiving work and Archives staff would welcome a couple of new volunteers on this new project.

The Quarter Sessions court at this time would have sat at the court house, now used as Ruthin Library. A visit to Ruthin library/the old Quarter Sessions court will have taken place in early June with a visit back in the Archives to talk about new project and look at new material.

The first session of the new project would start on Tuesday July 8th, 2025. If you are interested in volunteering on this new project, please email archives@newa.wales or ring 01824 708250

Seen in Passing...

One of Ruthin's most attractive heritage buildings is up for grabs. May 2025 saw the official marketing of both the Capel Bathafarn and associated manse, Market Street. They are to be sold at auction in late June. The guide price for the chapel at £50,000 presumably reflects what the agent calls 'an outbreak of dry rot... where previous treatment and repair has proved unsuccessful'. That for the house is £220,000.



The CELF initiative at the Craft Centre is very much to be welcomed. One indirect consequence, however, has been the removal of the tourist information point at the first unit on the right as visitors arrive from the car park. The good news is that the new space highlights the Civic Association's railway project (above). The bad, of course, is that we currently have to rely on The Old Courthouse to give out information on the town and, while this is better located, it doesn't (yet?) open regularly. We really do miss a permanent tourist information centre.



The former Blaze clothes shop near The Feathers on Well Street and its successor selling second-hand furniture was converted into flats almost 20 years ago. This was part of changes in town that have seen some units pass from retail to residential. This spring, the flats had a welcome makeover.

For much of the spring, the Town and Market Halls have been covered in scaffolding, as refurbishment of this important building continues. The lessee subsequently discovered that the roof repairs needed far more

attention that they bargained for.



We don't pretend to understand what this sculpture is all about but it sits very well in The Lord's Garden and even has a Tudor quality to it. We suspect that it's a piece of ash from Loggerheads that has been reimagined for Nantclwyd y Dre. Note the wall, following a tree fall.



'Where did I put that screwdriver?'



From a safety perspective, the sooner we see the back of the roundabout, the better. Not a day seems to go by when we see a motorist cutting across, for example, from Well Street to Market Street without navigating the



10 Years Ago

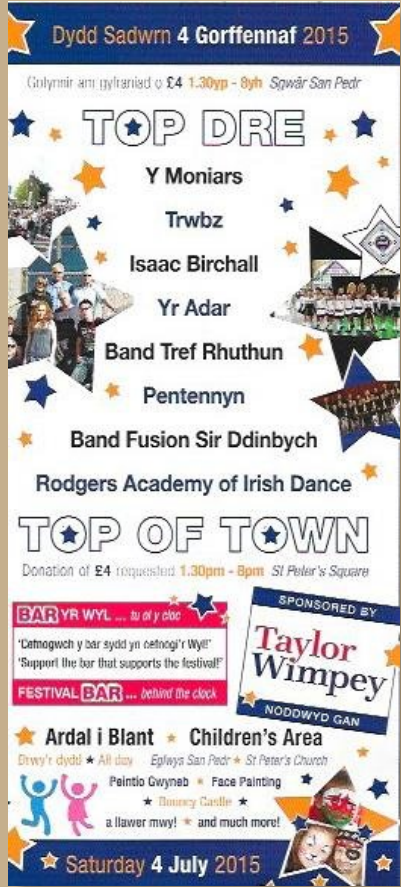
As we look forward to Gŵyl Rhuthun Festival this coming July, let us recall Saturday July 4th, 2015.

Top Dre, the Saturday afternoon and evening celebration, saw a surprise sponsor... Taylor Wimpey.

Since the November 2012 flooding at the then incomplete Glasdir housing estate, builder Taylor Wimpey had ground to a halt.

Their appearance as a sponsor was the strongest indication yet that the company was ready to restart its activity at Glasdir, 31 months after the disastrous floods.

We saw two of the unfinished houses completed in 2015. They marketed three former show homes in 2017. In 2018, the builder sought fresh permission to complete the site. That was three years after their festival sponsorship.



Note the appearance of Isaac Birchall on stage. Not mentioned on this flyer was Joe Woolford. We're sure he closed the 2015 show.

roundabout. Here, a motorist spotted a space and then seems to have deliberately gone around the wrong way to secure it.

We're more used to seeing high river levels than low but with the exceptionally dry spring the River Clwyd was at something of an all time low for the time of year. Cattle were taking advantage of it by paddling or moving to the newly exposed islands.

From Hard Times to High Living: The Llys Awelon Story

By Cyril Jones

The development on the site of the fields and gardens behind St Peter's Church is very exciting. You almost could say 'from the workhouse to a five star hotel'. Thanks to the vision of the 1960s, there is now decent care for elderly people in the Ruthin area.

For centuries, the care of the old, orphaned and needy was in the hands of the church and landowners. Llanfwrog, Llanrhudd and St Peter's Christ's Hospital provided an end-of-life refuge for the unfortunate. But with population growth by the Victorian era came the rigid regime of the Poor Law Act of 1834. Unions of the Poor were established all over the country. The Ruthin Workhouse was opened in 1837 in Llanrhudd, catered for 100 residents and lasted till 1930. Although records have not survived, it must be believed that the same central order had ruled. Men and women were kept apart and forced to sleep in dormitories. They had to work for periods of time and receive limited diets. Life in the workhouse was to be hard and unpleasant as they were named 'Bastilles', the former royal prison of France before the Revolution. I wonder if it was the disgrace of going to the workhouse that caused the loss of all local knowledge?

When in 1930 the Poor Unions were abolished, care in Ruthin came to the domain of the County Council's Welfare Committee. The 'Workhouse' was given a new name 'Rhyddfau' and thus began a kinder era.

After the fields behind St Peter's Church were purchased in 1964 from the Church in Wales authorities and the Diocese of St Asaph, a Centre for the Disabled and Elderly Home was planned. The site cost £5,658. That was built for £110,000 and opened in March and April



1970. There were 15 single and 15 double bedrooms. So there was room for nearly fifty residents. Mrs Gaynor Pickering's memories and the experience of working in Awelon for years paint a picture of the situation. Men and women were kept in separate lounges and in separate sections of the building. There were separate lavatories and bathrooms. There was a set routine and the getting up, meals and bedtime and at lunchtime a bell rang in the dining room. They had to wait their turn to have a bath, but there were sinks in the bedrooms.

Those who were able to perform certain tasks were expected to assist. They could go out to the town of Ruthin if necessary so there was some freedom. The home was managed by the matron and the master who lived in a bungalow near the entrance.

In the early 1970s, Mrs and Mrs Roberts were the 'master and matron', in



the shadow of the old authoritarian order of the workhouse. They were followed by individuals: Eric Pickering, Carol Axon, Vivienne Barlow, Holly Evans and Scott Robinson. It was a proud and happy community and the personal and medical care was very good. Towards the end of Awelon's life, some aspects had improved, with some rooms including a lavatory and washing area. But great change was coming with the new millennium and a more enlightened age.

Llys Awelon Phase 1

By 2011, there were forward-looking plans to build a number of new apartments near Awelon. Four flats were erected on the bungalow site and eighteen on the lower part of the site. By November 2011, the first part had been let to tenants and were opened on March 1st, 2012 by renowned tenor Trebor Edwards.

Each apartment consisted of one or two bedrooms, a kitchen, lounge and bathroom with shower. There was an extensive hallway and an external door controlled by the tenant with a personal key. Night and day care was arranged and everyone had a personal alarm.

The top two floors had spacious carpeted lounges and facilities for tea and light refreshments. There was a laundry on the ground floor and one flat was converted into a hairdressing salon. This department was run by Mis Gwawr Lewis and Awelon under the care of the Denbighshire Welfare Committee. Initially a Tenants' Committee was organised to discuss their situation and

Bobby Feeley adds:

I recently toured the newly extended extra care development of 35 apartments at Llys Awelon in Ruthin and was very impressed.

This brought back memories of 2012, when I visited the original 21 extra care apartments built on the site of the former Awelon Care Home, which was beloved for its care of the elderly but had to close for the extension. As Cabinet Lead and local member for Ruthin, it was a tough decision. The care home was no longer fit for purpose and the new apartments were in high demand. They offered a dignified, independent living solution, allowing couples to stay together despite health

issues. In spite of opposition, we closed the care home with minimal disruption to residents.

Grŵp Cynefin developed Llys Awelon Phase 2 for £10.6m, refurbishing the original apartments for £800k, resulting in 56 high-spec extra care apartments (20 one-bed and 36 two-bed) in Ruthin, with provisions for respite care and overnight stays for relatives.

The project took nearly 13 years from design to completion, with construction starting in 2022. Now, we have a superb complex ready to support our older, frailer residents for years to come.

requirements. Kinmel Bay area K&C, erected Part 1 of Llys Awelon at a cost of £5.2m funded by Tai Clwyd and the Welsh Government. The aim was comfort, care and independence.

By August 2019, Awelon was closed and some residents moved to Llys Awelon and others to care homes in the area. Llys Awelon's kitchen and dining room were lost so there had to be a temporary kitchen near the entrance. The bottom lounge became a dining room and for some years the midday meal had to be transported on trolleys from outside. This period also brought the Covid crisis to disrupt the lives of everyone throughout the country and drastically restrict the social life of the tenants of Llys Awelon.

Llys Awelon Phase 2

From summer 2020, there has been careful demolition of Awelon and the Centre for the Disabled. Canolfan Awelon had been used to host meetings of a number of local organisations and associations. With huge machinery, the demolition was carried out and grounds prepared for the 35 new flats. Huge steel frames were erected, insulated with protected cladding. By September 2024, they were ready and Part 1 residents and their belongings were moved into their new homes. 18 flats were left for improvement and modernisation for the new tenants.

The new development is spacious and beautiful, and landscaped with gardens, lawns and seating and parking. The corridors on each floor were carefully decorated with colourful pictures, all complete with luxurious carpets and central lifts to serve each floor. A large modern kitchen, spacious restaurant and luxury lounge now face towards the Vale and the Clwydian Hills.

It must be acknowledged and commended how the company 'Read' under its chief officer Ed Haley and his colleagues completed the work. They were extremely considerate and careful and prepared to inform us of the steps to follow. It is good to note that many of the workers and sub-contractors were local people and it is certain that all the work was a boost to the local economy.

In Llys Awelon Part 1 there has been considerable effort to enrich the everyday life of the residents (for example boccia games [carpet bowls], games such as cards, dominoes and scrabble). Visits from classes of Ysgol Pen Barras children have been an absolute pleasure plus periods of singing with Ceri Rawson from Llanrhaeadr. There have been a few talks and a visit from the Archives along with travel films. This continues to develop in the new building so that the 35 apartments will fill up and merge with the 18 apartments in Part 1.

The new £12.2m Llys Awelon is an ornament and worthy part of Ruthin town and this part of Denbighshire.

We have ascended from the era of the Workhouse to the era of the five star hotel!

Sisters in Service: The Impact in Ruthin of the Evangelizing Sisters

The Christian community in Ruthin has welcomed the planting of a new Catholic convent in Ruthin. Peter Daniels meets Sisters Trophosa and Jacqueline

Living in the former priest's house on Mwrog Street, the convent and its sisters were officially dedicated in March this year. Sr Trophosa Karugara from Kenya actually arrived October 2023 and in January 2025 was joined by Sr Annalydia Tukamuheba from Uganda and Sr Jacqueline Yobongiro from Kenya. They have become a regular sight on the town's streets.

The three sisters are part of the Missionary Congregation of the Evangelizing Sisters of Mary (usually abbreviated as the Evangelizing Sisters). The congregation was established 50 years ago, in March 1975, by the Comboni missionaries in Africa, by Rt. Revd. Mons. Bishop Sisto Mazzoldi MCCJ, and Very Revd. Fr. John Marengoni MCCJ. One prayed while in hospital not to die till he saw the fruit of his work. Both actually died 20 years apart on exactly the same day (July 27th) which the sisters feel is significant and a miracle.

Headquartered in Kenya, the sisters are the first missionary congregation from Africa. They now operate anywhere in the world and, alongside Wales, they have a presence in Jamaica, Cuba, Germany, the USA, Italy, England, Zambia, Southern Sudan, South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, England and Tanzania.

One of their three vows is that of obedience and, as such, they can be sent anywhere. The bishop of Wrexham identified a need in this part of the world. Ruthin, of course, is very different to some of the UK cities in which the sisters have lived. It is even more so than some other parts of the world. Yet, the sisters report that they have found Ruthinites welcoming and accepting. There has been no negativity, racism or bias shown. They feel at home here and it speaks of the people of Ruthin that they are so supportive of them.

The Evangelising Sisters' primary ministries & charism is rooted in the call to bring the Gospel to those on the margins. They do this in several ways.

First is a social ministry, in working with poorer people, sick people and elderly people. In some places, this social ministry includes running care homes. Their Ruthin convent, for example, is a place of hospitality. The sisters are variously trained as nurses,

social workers or in similar professions. In Ruthin, the sisters go into Ruthin Hospital, where they act as friends to patients. They will pray with patients but only if the patient initiates the request.

Secondly, they undertake a teaching ministry, working with schools. Thirdly, there is a pastoral ministry. And, finally, they offer 'catechetical instruction', which is teaching of the faith in their parish. Regardless of their individual professions, all are trained as catechists. They collaborate with other denominations to participate and pray and this has resulted in their being welcomed into St Peter's Church and Capel Bathania.

People of faith and none have welcomed the sisters but that doesn't mean the sisters' ministry is without its challenges. One such is the Welsh weather! In their part of Africa, the weather is either wet or sunny. In Wales, well, we know all about the vagaries of our climate and its extremes. October and especially January may not have been the best months to arrive here!

A second challenge is the difference in the environment in which the sisters work. Africa sees a growth in Christian adherents. It is acceptable to proselytise and admonish. They have access to all schools. In Wales, of course, the culture is different and the sisters must (and do) act within the law. They question themselves many times before they feel that they can be open about their faith and may only do so if requested. They have a respect for their surroundings. As such, much of their interactions with people is secular, unless invited to pray.

Their vows mean the sisters must be obedient to being sent anywhere in the world. There can be no guarantee they will stay in Ruthin or that the convent remains open. But they usually stay for between seven and 10 years. It is costly for the congregation to come to the UK and it is therefore not economic to remove sisters after just a short time. This nevertheless is a decision of their Mother General and local bishops.

Another rather fascinating element is the languages they speak. In Ruthin, we are used to speaking or hearing Welsh and English. The sisters, however, are linguists. There are two common languages of the order (English and Kiswahili). Add to this their native mother tongues and dialects, and other languages learnt in our various missions in different continents of the world.

The sisters usually try to learn the local language. In participating in the community choir, they offer support socially and are singing in Welsh as well as English. It is fascinating to think that, wherever they are sent in the future, they can take with them *laith y Nefoedd* as a tangible memory and reminder of their time in Ruthin.

Nantclwyd y Dre: a Place for Ruthin's Past... and Present

The team at Nantclwyd y Dre is looking to the local community to help write the house's next chapter, opening it up for use in new ways, writes Amy Broadbent

Readers will be very familiar with the traditional timber-framed frontage of Nantclwyd y Dre historic house and gardens on Castle Street. Set just about half-way between Ruthin Castle and St Peter's Square, the house's iconic porch, perched on ancient wooden stilts dating back to 1435, are passed every day by locals going about their daily business.

But how many are familiar with the stories that can be discovered behind its impressive oak door, and the ways in which Ruthin residents can make use of its incredible spaces and enchanting gardens?

Open as a visitor attraction from April to September, Nantclwyd y Dre today offers an exploration of over 500 years of history under one roof, telling stories of the colourful characters and families who have called this charming higgledy-piggledy house 'home' over the centuries, in a unique way.

Gone are the red ropes typically found in such properties, and few are the 'do not touch' signs. Rather, visitors are encouraged to make themselves at home in history and experience the house 'hands-on' as the families who lived here did, enjoying traditional board games together in the parlour, a round of croquet on the lawn, or taking a leisurely stroll through the beautiful gardens with vintage teacup in hand.

Carefully crafted interactive trails and exhibitions bring to life stories of weavers, pilgrims, Royalist officers, a



rebellious rector, a school mistress, and a family devoted to arts and crafts, allowing visitors of all ages to 'travel through time' as they experience centuries worth of history, from mediæval to modern.

Holding a Hidden Gem award, Kids in Museums accreditation, dog friendly status, and a 4½-star Trip Advisor rating, Nantclwyd y Dre is a popular attraction with both visitors to the town and locals looking to enjoy the annual updates to the visitor experience.

But without a family in residence today (aside from our beloved roost of Pipstrelle and Lesser-Horseshoe bats!), the team at Nantclwyd y Dre is looking to the local community to help write the house's next chapter, opening it up for use in new ways.

Hot-desking, wedding ceremonies, and general venue hire options; the freely accessible Coffee Corner available for locals to use during open

hours; a suite of arts and crafts workshops to continue the house's creative traditions; and, a forthcoming schedule of new events, are set to make Nantclwyd y Dre a place not just to visit, but also to regularly meet, create, and celebrate.

Equally with residents in mind, the seasonal Garden Pass is returning for 2025. Available for individuals (£10) or families (£15), the pass offers unlimited access to the extensive formal and wild gardens during normal opening, perfect for those looking for an afternoon of lawn games, or a tranquil spot with picturesque views away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

By warmly inviting local residents to make Nantclwyd y Dre a part of their own stories in these new ways, the house hopes to become an integral part of local life year-round, serving as a home for memories to come, as well as a window to the past.

Reimagined

From p1

Our marketing efforts as a wedding destination have thus far been somewhat lacklustre. With stunning venues like the soon-to-be-finished St Peter's, the bucolic St Meugan's, the grand Y Tabernacl, and the striking Pendref, we have much to offer. Additionally, The Old Courthouse, Nantclwyd y Dre, and The Ruthin Castle Hotel & Spa provide excellent options for secular ceremonies of varying sizes. How can we present these venues as a cohesive offer? How can we become a wedding destination? Our approach should be more proactive than what we see in neighbouring towns, whose own offers, let's face it, are indifferent at best.

Families are another vital audience we must not overlook. They need

compelling reasons to visit. The Old Gaol is a fantastic start, but we should aim for more attractions. Adventure golf, for instance, is currently a popular trend.

At the heart of our identity lies our heritage. We must explore innovative ways to showcase this treasure. As highlighted in 'Wales: 100 Places to See Before You Die', Ruthin is truly unique, with its enchanting black and white timbered houses. It deserves to be preserved as a national monument, as the book suggests. How many people outside the area are aware of this?

Realising this vision requires a specific skill set. With a potential vacancy to promote The Old Courthouse, why not adopt a holistic approach for the entire town? Our current logo feels tired and uninspired, and it should be revitalised as part of this process. Moreover, how can we leverage platforms like TikTok to elevate our profile and attract attention?

By coming together as a community and embracing our cultural assets, we can transform Ruthin into a vibrant destination that celebrates its unique heritage and artistic spirit. Let's seize this opportunity to create a brighter future for our town, inviting visitors and residents alike to experience all that Ruthin has to offer.



From Cells to Shells: 250 years of Ruthin Gaol

Ruthin Gaol proudly commemorates a remarkable 250 years of its storied past, evolving from a prison to a wartime factory, and now serving as a distinctive emblem of local heritage, enhanced by updated exhibitions and engaging activities for visitors of all ages.

In Compassion to the Unfortunate

While a house of correction had existed on this site long before, it was in 1775 that the oldest surviving section of the Gaol was constructed. This significant development, designed by the esteemed local architect Joseph Turner, heralded a transformative period in the institution's history, aligning with pivotal reforms in the treatment of inmates.

As societal perspectives on crime and punishment evolved, a rigid Victorian ethos emerged, emphasising reform over mere retribution, a philosophy vividly embodied in the striking architecture of the Pentonville wing, which remains accessible to visitors today.

'Britain's Strangest War Factory'

After ceasing its function as a prison in 1916, the site was repurposed as a munitions factory during the Second World War, providing a comparatively secure environment for the Lang Pen Company, usually based in Liverpool. This transition brought with it female machinists from Liverpool who collaborated with local women from

'Munitionettes' at work in the Gaol's basement



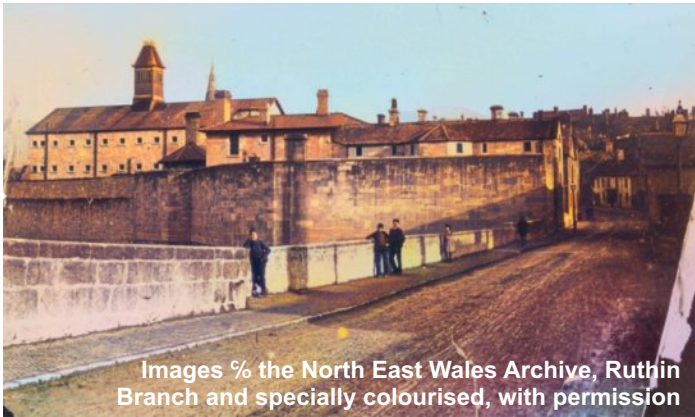
Ruthin collectively known as the 'Munitionettes'. They played an indispensable role in the wartime effort.

A Unique Victorian Prison Experience

Today, Ruthin Gaol invites visitors to delve into its rich history, offering a glimpse into the daily lives of those who inhabited and worked within its walls through engaging exhibitions and interactive puzzle trails designed for younger guests.

This milestone year serves as an ideal opportunity for local residents to rediscover this cherished heritage site and reconnect with a significant chapter of their local history.

■ New in 2025 within a prison cell rededicated to the productions of munitions are a number of items on display plus a contemporary film of the 'Munitionettes', including some footage of within the former cinema, Well Street.



A Legacy of Learning

It's possible to pass the imposing facade of the Naylor Leyland Centre, Well Street, without fully appreciating its significant impact on the town, writes Liz Williams.

In the mid-19th century, the area occupied by the centre and Y Tabernacl was likened to a slum to rival the conditions of Liverpool's Gorbals. Within were shops and cottages, including a baker, a butcher and, interestingly, a well-sinker.

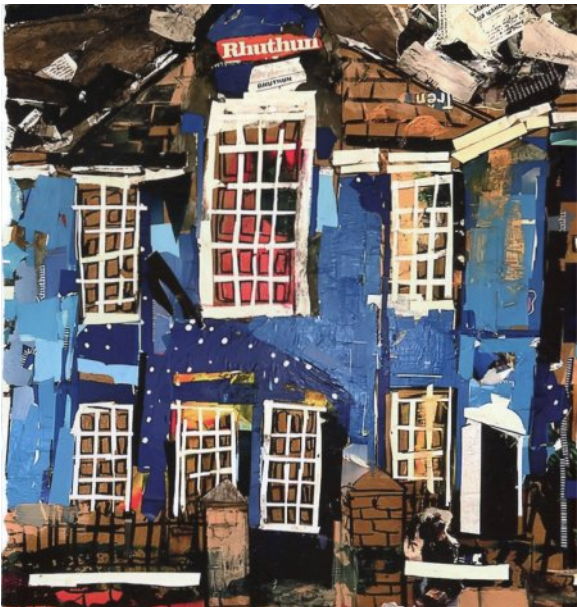
In 1914 on this site the Naylor Leyland Institute was erected, to provide technical education becoming popular at the time. It resulted from a charitable bequest of £520 from benefactor Lady Naylor Leyland of Nantclwyd Hall. It was built by the historic Denbighshire County Council at a final cost of £1,587/6/2d. The County School for Girls (now Brynhyfryd) and the other two State schools in Ruthin were allocated a day each within. Local village elementary schools were also given time there and

the county council paid for their rail travel to Ruthin.

After its closure as a technical school, it continued in public service. It was used as a woodwork and domestic science school room for Ysgol Brynhyfryd and even a venue for the town's youth club. It became a central kitchen for school meals for the schools in and around the town, and then a central school library up to and immediately after the local government reorganisation that resulted in the new Denbighshire authority.

We know it today as the fully refurbished Naylor Leyland Centre, wherein lies the Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council. Within is this incredible artwork commemorating the building.

■ From information supplied by Roger Edwards



Crafting a Future: the Vision Behind Ruthin's Craft Centre

Heather Williams reflects on the development of a creative hub

When I was in Ruthin Archives recently, I came across a 1977 Clwyd County Council document that had plans and drawings of the original concept for the development of the old railway station yard in Ruthin.

This document had been drawn up following the Bolton Report in 1971 about an Inquiry on Small Firms. The proposals showed an attempt to encourage local industry in the Ruthin

Agency and the EEC Regional Fund.

This development was not built, but formed the kernel of the idea for the Craft Centre which was built in 1982.

The Craft Centre built in 1982 incorporated the design around an enclosed quadrangle, with several craft workshops which included a glass maker, sculptor, picture framer and potter, as well as a gallery, a Tourist Information Centre, shop and café. This proved very successful under the leadership of Director, Phillip Hughes.

However, with its developing reputation both nationally and internationally, it needed to have a much larger gallery space, a larger retail space, artist display studios and a large education room for running workshops.

In 2005 plans were revealed, drawn up by the architectural company Sergison Bates, for the new craft centre which was rebuilt on the footprint of the old Craft Centre. The £4.4m project was made possible with a major capital grant from the Arts Council for the Wales, as well as other contributors. The external design of the building produced a sense of place of the

landscape in which it sits, with the red sandstone of Ruthin reflected in the colour of the walls and the zig-zag zinc roof being inspired by the Clwydian Hills. It was opened in 2008 and was one of the five buildings shortlisted for The Art Fund Prize the following year. The Craft Centre, now also known as a Centre for the Applied Arts, finally had room to host some incredible exhibitions in the three galleries, and further develop its reputation in the arts world.

Ruthin Craft Centre has recently been selected as one of nine venues in Wales to establish a national contemporary art gallery for Wales, which is called Celf ar y Cyd (Art in Collaboration). The other galleries in North Wales are the Mostyn in Llandudno, Storiell in Bangor and Plas Glyn-y-Weddw in Pwllheli (a full list of venues in Wales can be found on the website www.celfarycyd.wales).

This initiative provides access both digitally and physically to the nation's collections across Wales. Through an extensive loans programme, people in Wales will be able to explore the collection within their own localities, while it also enables more people across Wales, the UK and internationally to have improved digital access to the national collection.



The opening event was held on April 5th, 2025, with an opening Celf exhibition of ceramics from the Anita Besson Collection (which is on display until June 15th). The potter and presenter of The Great British Pottery Throw Down, Keith Brymer-Jones, opened the exhibition. On the same date the new permanent sculpture on the outside of the Craft Centre (below) was formally acknowledged. This has been created by the artist/blacksmith Angharad Pearce-Jones and is the culmination of a year long period of research into the history of Ruthin and incorporates elements connected to the former railway.

To discover more about Celf and this sculpture, visit the refurbished room (on the right hand side as you go through into the courtyard from the car park, the former Tourist Information Point) where you can also see new interpretation boards relating to the Civic Association's project relating to the railway and the restored crane.



area, where employment was badly needed. It stated that small firms, particularly those with a craft bias, had relevance to the rural area where unemployment was often hidden by outward migration.

Preservation and conservation of Ruthin was accepted but, at the same time, balanced growth was to be promoted. It was considered that Ruthin had no tradition of industry but tourism was identified as a sector which held considerable development potential for the town.

At that time about 20 per cent of employment was derived directly or indirectly from tourism. Tourism needed more employment but new industry was felt to fit more easily into existing economic structures.

The proposal plans had units to form a craft village with workshops on the eight hectare site. The concept was to have the workshops arranged around an internal courtyard with a basic unit of 25m² square metres, which could be extended in multiples of 25m², depending on requirements. In addition, an administrative block with a display area was proposed, a central secretarial services area, a café and living accommodation for a caretaker.

The total cost of the project was £320,000, with funding coming from sources such as the Welsh Development



Ruthin School's Artistic Triumph: A Brush with History

by our 16th Century Correspondent

In a most remarkable event that did transpire, we do believe in the month of December in the year of our Lord 2024, at Bonham's in London, a portrait of the esteemed Ruthinite Gabriel Goodman, dating from the latter part of the 16th century, was sold for the notable sum of 63 guineas and one shilling [£25,600 today—Ed].

The seller, the Goodman and Ruthin Charity, did facilitate this significant transaction. And who was the purchaser, thou dost ask? It was none other than our own Ruthin School. Thus, the portrait doth remain within the town.

This exquisite full-length oil painting, depicting Goodman seated in elegant black raiment, is adorned with inscriptions and doth proudly display the coat-of-arms of the sitter. Measuring a substantial 44 inches by 34 inches, it is widely held that this artwork was commissioned by Goodman himself, and was later bestowed upon the Warden of Christ's Hospital in Ruthin.

Gabriel Goodman, born in the year of our Lord 1528 and departing this life in 1601, did serve as the Dean of

Westminster from the year 1561 until the end of his days. A native of Ruthin, he did receive his education at Jesus College, Cambridge, and emerged as a prominent figure in both the realms of education and church governance. His influence was most pivotal in the establishment of Christ's Hospital in Ruthin (the Almshouses behind St Peter's Church), and he did make significant contributions to Westminster School, as well as to Ruthin School itself and St Peter's.

Goodman's enduring legacy is commemorated within the hallowed grounds of Westminster Abbey, where he doth rest in peace, a testament to his profound impact upon the educational institutions he did help to shape. A copy of this illustrious portrait doth reside in the National Portrait Gallery in London, further solidifying Gabriel Goodman's place in the annals of history.

The purchase of the portrait by the Ruthin School doth signify that, despite a change of ownership, the school still doth see itself as part of the community. The school hath employed the acquisition of the portrait to enlighten its international students regarding the history of the school and the culture of



the local area.

In terms of cultural links, it is notable that Ruthin School hath reintroduced the Welsh tongue to its curriculum after a notable absence, when the previous long-serving head did abolish it. It hath been a decade since the missive from the head to the press did provoke such a strong response. We can but hope that compulsory Latin shall soon return.

Dream On: Wattle happen next?

Andrew Peers looks at the important restoration project that is the Dreamatorium

Plas Coch, also now known as The Dreamatorium, is a beautiful 17th century building. Built using re-purposed red sandstone from Ruthin Castle, this property is brimming with history and has seen many changes over its long and fascinating past.

Built in 1605 allegedly for the fabled Constable of the Castle, it has been a home to many residents: a professional opera singer, retired hoteliers, an ironmonger, a laundress and even a member of the local nobility, Lady Margaret Thelwall.

From the 19th century, the property alternated between being a guest house and private residence. In the 1960s, it was purchased by Mr and Mrs Rees-Jones, who restored and transformed it into a banqueting hall.

In the 1970s, Plas Coch became the Plas Coch Hotel and then for several decades the home of the Conservative Club, where it was used as a venue for local people to congregate. As time passed, the Conservative Club closed (2021) and the tired building stood empty till 2022, when it was purchased

by local business owners Tracey Dutton and Kevin Jones.

They had a vision to see the potential of what this magnificent building might offer. They soon started the transformation of Plas Coch into The Dreamatorium. Throughout the renovation, a variety of local skilled craftsmen were employed to ensure that the work undertaken was of the highest quality, preserving many of the original features, including the 17th century wattle and daub and even markings, which some experts believe to be Medieval graffiti.

Tracey formed Lavinia Stamps in 2006 and was soon joined by her partner, Kevin. The business had humble beginnings in a garden cabin and grew from strength to strength.

Today, Lavinia Stamps ships their products worldwide. Tracey had a passion for drawing from and soon recognised her fascination with fairies and fantasy. The images she draws are turned into polymer stamps, enabling people to express their own creativity.

The Dreamatorium is a space where Lavinia Stamps share their passion with like-minded people. Its purpose is that of a creative hub, offering workshops, demonstrations, sharing knowledge and skills. It is a place where individuals can take crafting to an artistic level with achievable results, while appealing to all

crafting capabilities. It is a place where people come together to find endless inspiration and guidance, whilst being supported with all the required tools that they might need.

■ *The project is one of the most inspirational heritage redevelopments in 21st century Ruthin, the more so as it was financed entirely privately. Given the international reputation of Lavinia Stamps and the clients who visit from all over the world, we're optimistic this will have a profound positive impact on lower Well Street businesses. The business at Plas Coch and Lôn Parcwr employs over 20 people. When I was last in Plas Coch, there were people from Derbyshire and Staffordshire—Ed.*



Meet the County's New Vice-chair...

Former Civic Association Chair Councillor Bobby Feeley has been honoured by being elected as Denbighshire County Council's Vice-chair for 2025-26.

Bobby served on Glyndŵr Council from 1986 to 1995 and then represented Denbighshire from 1995 to 1999, returning again in 2008, where she remains.



During her time on Glyndŵr, she chaired the Environmental Health Committee and later the Licensing Committee.

She joined the Civic Association Committee in the early 2000s, eventually becoming both Secretary and Chair. Although she says she thoroughly enjoyed her time with us, she stepped down after 2008 after re-election to Denbighshire.

From 2012 to 2022, Bobby served as the Cabinet Lead Member for Health and Social Care, which included responsibilities for Heritage, Leisure, and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Additionally, Bobby was a

member of the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board from 2014 to 2018.

Over the course of her career, she has accumulated approximately 30 years of experience, yet she has never held the position of Chair, which led her to believe that the time was right to seek election.

As Vice-chair and later Chair, Bobby hopes to assist in restoring Denbighshire's good name, as the council has faced significant challenges over the past two to three years, particularly concerning the rollout of the new waste collection system.

In congratulating Bobby, we wish her well with this challenging but ultimately rewarding endeavour.

... and the Town's New Mayor

Heather Williams gets to know the 2025-26 Mayor of Ruthin, Peter Daniels

HW: How long have you lived in Ruthin/Ruthin area?

PD: A mere 36 years, this March. My wife the Mayoress's family, however, has been resident here since at least the early 18th century and undoubtedly before that.

HW: What do you like about living here?

PD: There are the obvious things, such as the district's sense of community, the range of independent shops, access to the hills to Ruthin's east and west, and the low crime rate. But, above all, it's Ruthin's unique streetscape that shines. Of all the towns in North East Wales, Ruthin stands out. That and the fact that everything's accessible & available on foot. That convenience is exceptionally advantageous.

HW: When did you become a Ruthin Town Councillor and why?

PD: In 2022. I like to think I'm civic minded. I had been observing Town Council meetings either in person or at covid online for a number of years and had great admiration for town councillors as volunteers. (Yes, we're all volunteers.) I am probably one of very few laypersons left who is actually fond of local government and its vital role. By 2026, I've worked or been a councillor in that system for 40 years.

HW: How have you contributed to the work of the Council since you joined it?

PD: I have chaired the Town Council's General Purposes, Planning and Finance Committee (one of the Town Council's two) and have been involved with personnel

matters and, slowly but surely, the development of the website (more work to do, there!).

HW: What do you get out of being a 'Welcome' volunteer in the Old Courthouse?

PD: Volunteering weekly during the season in The Old Courthouse is a joy, especially when you meet repeat visitors or those who discover Ruthin for the first time. More than that, I have found some visitors who know more about Ruthin than the average resident, myself included! Virtually every visitor has commented how useful it has been meeting someone who has time to explain about the building and about what Ruthin (and district) has to offer. Volunteering, I have had the pleasure of welcoming people from all over the world.

HW: How do you think that the Town Council can help to make Ruthin a better place in which to live?

PD: Long-standing initiatives such as the Market Town of the Future already have an impact on Ruthin and its residents. We are an ambitious council. We are blessed with town councillors with particular vision. I am particularly delighted that the Town Council continues to support small businesses, for example by offering free parking for a 12 month pilot, this year (see p16).

HW: What are some of the challenges the Town Council faces during 2025-26?

PD: Could it be that in 2025-26 the Town Council can plan for taking over some of the facilities currently undertaken by the County Council? We need to play our part in trying to ensure essential services continue, in the light of the obvious and acute financial difficulties at Denbighshire (as elsewhere). The main challenge for me, however, is ensuring that the



Town Council is statutorily compliant in every particular. Currently, it isn't, not in every case.

HW: What would you like to achieve in your year as Mayor?

PD: I have set a target for financial compliance by then end of July 2025 and in other matters by the end of August. These dates are themselves challenging. Otherwise, I'd like to support public transport, try to ensure town traders are fully championed and, not least, ensure that the mayor is much more visible. The last of these is so much easier for someone who is semi-retired rather than those who work or study.

HW: What charity/charities are you supporting during your Mayoral year, and why have you chosen it/them?

PD: ■ Transforming Lives for Good, a national charity working in Ruthin with some local children, via St Peter's.

■ Denbighshire & Conwy Stroke Association, because both the Mayor and Mayoress' families have been devastated by this terrible disability.

■ Vale of Clwyd Mind, in support of its work locally and the importance placed these days on all things to do with mental health.

Stories from the Stacks: feedback from the NEWA creative archives consultation in Ruthin

by Heather Williams

On April 1st, 2025, Civic Association Chair Anne Roberts and Secretary Heather Williams represented the association at a morning stakeholders' event for members of the North East Wales Heritage Forum held at Ruthin Gaol. Here is a brief summary of the presentation and discussions that took place during the event.

Layout Plan of the New Building

Archive staff presented a draft layout for the new North East Wales Archives (NEWA) building, proposed to be constructed next to Theatr Clwyd in Mold.

Stakeholders were encouraged to provide comments and suggestions, indicating that the plan may undergo slight modifications. The lower floor was designed to include an open plan self-service area, a community space, and a reading room, alongside essential facilities such as lockers and lavatories.

Additionally, there will be a document reception area, an interpretation area, and a repository for archival materials. The upper floor will house staff offices, a meeting room, a kitchen, a conservation studio, and a digitisation studio, all aimed at enhancing the usefulness of the new facility.

Importance of Widening the Audience

The discussions highlighted the necessity of broadening the audience for the archives. Officers emphasised that the heritage held and the stories told should reflect the diversity of our communities. This approach was said to be vital for enhancing the sustainability and relevance of NEWA while building stronger relationships with local communities. By doing so, the archives might underscore the importance of

preserving and accessing historical records, fostering a better understanding of the past through new perspectives and interpretations. It was deemed essential to widen the range of voices NEWA represented.

Proposed Activities

A variety of engaging activities were suggested to connect with the wider community. These include creating memory boxes and developing creative arts inspired by stories from the archives.

Resource packs for schools and cooking classes were also proposed,

anticipated in early 2026. Construction is set to begin in mid-2026, with the completion of the building projected for late 2027.

Note that the Archive in Ruthin (and Hawarden) is likely to close well in advance of the move, to facilitate cataloguing and boxing-up.

Ruthin Archive Presence

NEWA is committed to maintaining an archive presence at the Old Gaol in Ruthin, ensuring that the community continues to have access to its historical resources. A dedicated space will be established at the frontage of Clwyd

Street at no. 46, allowing for an archive presence to remain in place when the new building in Mold opens. The Old Gaol will continue to expand as a heritage attraction while still being utilised for its original purpose (not, however, as a prison!).

The consultation process had involved various groups, including dementia groups, schools, youth councils, GPs, clubs, societies, teachers, Theatr Clwyd, and the North East Wales Heritage Forum, ensuring a comprehensive approach to gathering input.

Focus Group Discussions

At the event, attendees from different heritage groups were split into two groups to discuss their hopes for the new archive centre in Mold. They shared ideas for activities and suggestions for interpretation.

Participants expressed a desire for easier access to maps and proposed extended opening hours, including one evening and Saturday morning. They also highlighted the importance of ensuring that visiting groups do not disrupt the quiet search room area. Other suggestions included visits to care homes, touring exhibitions, and themes for interpretation that encompass industry, jobs, and family days, all aimed at improving access to materials.

In the afternoon, members of the public were invited to visit the Archives and share their views, further enriching the consultation process and fostering community engagement.



Denbighshire's Archive is currently in The Old Gaol complex, Clwyd Street. Work has begun on no. 46, left

alongside initiatives to collect stories from unheard voices and offer behind-the-scenes tours. Opportunities for Duke of Edinburgh awards and 'hack days' (whatever they are!) aimed at creating apps for digital storytelling were discussed as well.

NEWA expressed a keen interest in recruiting volunteers to assist with research for stories that will be interpreted in the new archive centre, further enriching the community's involvement.

Project Timeline

A revised project plan is expected to be submitted by late 2025, with a decision from the National Lottery Heritage Fund



The proposed site of the new Archive, adjacent to Theatr Clwyd, Mold

Chat GPT 'Answers'

See page 6. How did Chat GPT do?

1. Of course, Ruthin did not have a Marks & Spencer.
2. Rachel Reeves has never lived in Ruthin (to our knowledge).
3. Alas! Ruthin Town FC has never migrated up to the Championship.
4. Ruthin has never had a Lloyd's Bank branch. The reference to the closure (2017) was actually for the former Nat West.
5. The TSB (Well Street) closed in 1994.
6. Glyndŵr's chief executive was Julian Parry. David Jones was a Denbigh councillor. The date it ceased was correctly identified by Chat GPT.
7. In terms of county towns, Chat GPT is correct.
8. The Clerk was Joseph Peers. Reference to Sir John Williams was a 17th century Clerk more associated with Denbigh.
9. Mair Hafina Clwyd Jones.
10. Chat GPT has this right, though it could have mentioned the judges' lodgings.
11. The line was nowhere near completed. In fact, it hardly started.
12. The answer on the industrial employer is nonsense.
13. Chat GPT has Emrys Wynne right and is almost correct for Bobby Feeley (she was a Liberal Democrat, now independent). Huw Hilditch-Roberts is an independent.
14. Correct in every particular.
15. A good answer marred by the inclusion of what Chat GPT thinks are visible town walls.

Free Parking

Residents and visitors will be able to enjoy an hour's free parking in town, thanks to a 12-month pilot initiative funded by the Town Council.

The car parks involved are likely to be Crispin Yard, Park Road and Dog Lane.

The free parking will begin as soon as negotiations are complete and the County Council is able to implement the change. As yet, there is no start date.

Tourists themselves usually factor in car parking costs when they visit any destination. They expect it.

Residents, however, often wish to pop in for a short period and the project is aimed at promoting visits especially for them, encourage town centre activity and economic growth.

The Town Council hopes therefore that the pilot will in some way help to regenerate trade in the town. Currently, footfall remains at an all-time low (as it does in many country towns).

The Town Council will review the pilot towards the end of the year's pilot.



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

Town & Around is published quarterly by the Ruthin & District Civic Association. It is available from Ruthin Library and on townandaround.org.uk. It is delivered free to Civic Association members

Editor, Layout & Design:
Peter Daniels cymru@clwyd.org

Secretary: Heather Williams
ruthincivic@btinternet.com

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

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

The deadline for the next edition is August 15th, 2025

Thanks are due to this quarter's contributors: Amy Broadbent, Peter Daniels, Bobby Feeley, Cyril Jones, Andrew Peers, Rob Price, Anne Roberts, Heather Williams and Liz Williams.

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

© June 2025
Ruthin & District Civic Association

Join Ruthin & District Civic Association and help support our work and the production & distribution of Town & Around

Annual subscription rates are £10 (individual) or £15 (joint/family). If you are not sure if you are a paid up member, please check with the Treasurer.

The Association tries to help protect & enhance the outstanding market town of Ruthin and the areas nearby. Our main aims are to promote 'civic pride' in the town and surrounding villages. We also aim to promote high standards in planning and encourage architectural excellence. We organise the annual Open Doors heritage weekends and the Quayle Awards.

(1) Name _____

(2) Name _____

Address _____

Telephone: _____ Email _____

Forward this to the address below with either:

- A cheque for £10 or £15 (delete as appropriate) payable to Ruthin & District Civic Association; or
- To pay by bank transfer or standing order, request that the Hon. Treasurer contacts you with details of how to do so.

Robert Williams, Hon. Treasurer, Lenton House, Mold Road, Ruthin LL15 1SL (tel 704998 / ruthincivic@btinternet.com)