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Ludlow Heritage News

No. 13 April 1990

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Gaius Smith & Co, King Street

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BUYING FOOD IN LUDLOW IN THE 20s AND 30s

The last of the traditional grocery shops in Ludlow has recently closed. We are now served by three supermarkets. It may be interesting to look back and see how we bought our food in the 1920s and 1930s. The change since then has been dramatic.

Ludlow had several family-run shops – Gaius Smith in King Street was the largest, with its pretty cast iron front – reviled in the 30s, now no more – its loss regretted.

Then there was Valentines, now being restored at the top of Broad Street, Stephens and Sweetmans, Gatehouse, J. C. Lloyd, and Steads in Tower Street. There were also small shops belonging to national chains – Melias, Hunters, the Maypole, and the Co-op.

The London Tea Company was in King Street on the site of the present-day butcher's shop. It was a rather dark, mysterious, cavernous shop with dark mahogany shelves holding rows of tea and coffee canisters. No-one seemed to know to whom it belonged. The Manager was a Mr Cash.

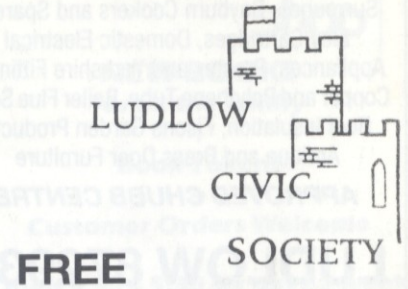
Much of the trade was done by delivery vans. A representative was driven round the houses and farms on routes. Routes were to Burwarton, Corvedale, Richard's Castle, Ashford, and so on. The traveller took down the orders, discussing prices and quality. The orders were brought back to be assembled. Goods were packed in brown paper parcels with white string – no boxes were used.

On the day of delivery the parcels were placed outside the shop on the pavement. They were then loaded in the correct order for delivery. All sorts of small services with no connection with the grocery trade were given. Prescriptions and boot repairs were collected and delivered.

Town customers brought their orders into the shops already written out or read to an assistant. These orders were packed into baskets and delivered by boys on bicycles. Most county ladies did not go into the shops. They sounded their car horns and an assistant ran out and took down the order. This custom was broken by a young chemist, new to Ludlow, and just out of the army. On being told that the Hon so-and-so was tooting her horn on the Bull Ring, he despatched an assistant to tell her that if she wished to be served, to enter the shop in the same way as everyone else. Encouraged by this, the grocery shops followed suit and the practice ceased.

All assistants were male. A few girls were employed as clerks or in packing goods behind the scenes.

Deliveries to the shops were almost entirely by train – goods were brought from the station by lorry. There were hardly any pre-packed foods, dried fruit, tea, coffee, flour, etc all had to be weighed and packed. This packaging was quite an art. The choice of qualities was wide. Not just the one packet of mediocre quality on



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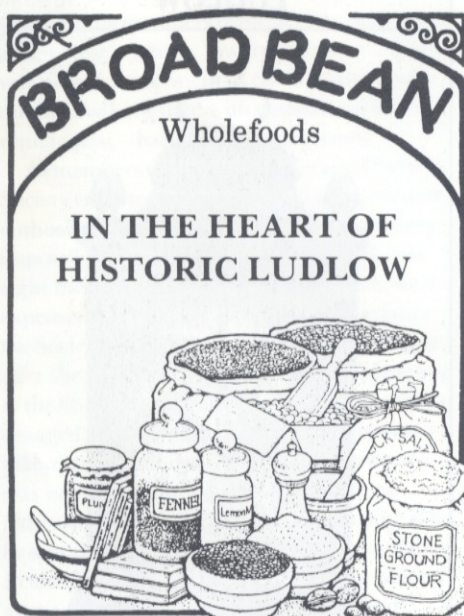
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offer today. Currants for example were large with a delightful bloom – not the gritty things sold nowadays.

Food shops had no refrigeration. Perishable goods were kept in cellars. The shops had vast cellars. One could go into the cellar at Gaius Smith's and emerge in the London Tea Company 100 yards further up the street.

In spite of the supermarkets there is still room for small food shops, albeit in a different form. Health shops and delicatessens are opening, specialising in quality goods and unusual items. The picture is not all gloom for the small shopkeepers, long may they continue.

In the 1930s there were three fishmongers in the town – in High Street, Tower Street and Upper Galdeford. Today there are none, in spite of the increase in population. There were many family butchers, at least three in the Bull Ring. A picture of the butcher's wives in their bright white starched overalls sticks in the mind. The market was smaller than it is now. Stalls were held more by local people, selling local produce. John Norton (father of 'our' John) held a produce auction once a week in the Market Hall.

Two weeks before Christmas, the live poultry market was held in Castle Square. Poultry was brought from the surrounding district for sale. One week before Christmas the dead poultry market took place – also in Castle Square. These two events were colourful, animated scenes in the town.

When one sees crowds of tourists in the town today, it is difficult to imagine how parochial Ludlow was in the 20s and 30s. Trade was confined to the people of the town and district. A stranger in a shop was an event and looked upon as a bonus. As one journalist put it, 'The Great Bastion' of the Clec kept away the crowds of the industrial Midlands.

R. Stephens

Editorial note: At that time every shopkeeper worth his salt, also knew his customers by name.

Adrian Jones MVO

Regular readers will know of the interest the Society has taken in the fate of the 'Ludlow horse' – the plaster cast of the memorial to the South Australian Volunteers (Boer War) by Adrian Jones. This has now been moved from Ludlow under the direction of Paul Tew of the National Army Museum, and Major Richard Morrison and Staff Sergeant Neil Stainthorpe of 125 Staffordshire Field Support Squadron, Royal Engineers.

Adrian R. Carlton, Head of Conservation at the National Army Museum is now investigating the most appropriate means of restoration, and possible re-casting in bronze. We aim to keep members of the Society informed of any further developments.



Valentines (Fine Fare) and staff August 1937
Photograph reproduced by kind permission of the
County Museum Service

'Ludlow is one of the best retiring-to towns I ever saw, having that quality that cannot be expressed and compensates (in part) for want of fortune and confinement in any place'.

Hon. John Byng, 1784: *The Torrington Diaries*

We lived in Birmingham for twelve years and so became familiar with Ludlow and the Border country. Before retiring in the late nineteen-fifties we had various reconnaissance holidays but before coming to a decision we always used Ludlow as a yardstick. In the end Ludlow won.

One of the attractions was the ease in which one had access into the country within walking distance, and when the plans were put forward to build the bypass over Whitcliffe many of us were filled with dismay. Not just a section of Ludlow people by any means, but letters and criticism came from far afield. I remember one headline in a paper 'Has Ludlow Gone Mad?'. I always found it difficult to understand how anyone could contemplate building a road over the one piece of open land near at hand. I had some sympathy for those interested in the Ludlow Fossil Bed – more famous throughout the world than the church or the castle. Of course, it is always sad to accept when our own area is disturbed. There is no doubt that one does not solve one problem without creating another.

I expect a number of people will remember coal being delivered in a horse-drawn cart. It was a fine sight to see the horses coming up Corve Street – 'his bright and battering sandal'. Whether the horses enjoyed it or not I cannot tell. Horses were still used bringing loads of tree trunks down the steep hill on High Vinnals. It was an awesome sight – I gave them a wide berth.

An unusual custom I had not met before was the ringing of the curfew from Michaelmas to Candlemas. I used to go into my little garden, providing it was not too cold, and listen. I liked it. I was very sorry when with the death of Mr Nash there was no-one to take his place. Something else gone. Not that I had need to douse the flames, I had a gas fire.

There has been a great increase in the number of shops selling antiques and also gift shops. There is one shop I do remember – it was a grocer's shop in King Street – it had a counter and beautiful mahogany drawers with Sago and Rice and Tapioca on them. I did wonder even then if mice had many a delicious meal at dead of night.

The Ludlow Festival started soon after we came. I have a certificate for £5 subscription to the loan capital. It is dated 30.1.60. It was signed by Arthur B. Reynolds of Dinham House. NOTE Please keep carefully for future reference. I have – but I doubt if it will add much to my estate. Bishop Sara was a great supporter of the Festival, I remember him too protesting vigorously against the cobbles in Broad Street being removed to make parking easier for cars – even to the length of threatening to sit down on the cobbles. The cobbles are still there.

No-one who lived then can have forgotten the horrors of the winter of 1962-63. The greyness – the cold and frozen pipes. For days on end Mill Street looked the abomination of desolation – the only solace there were no cars to clutter up what is a beautiful street. Another memory of that bitter winter. I saw a cow crossing the river at Dinham Bridge. I watched in fear and trembling hoping the ice would hold – I did not feel competent to rescue a cow – it did. She kept a straight and steady course and made a safe landing.

In sharp contrast was the drought of 1976 – lawns were looking like the desert, and forest fires, I shall never forget the joy of hearing an unusual sound – as far away as the square. It was water flowing over the weir – the sweetest music we could have heard.

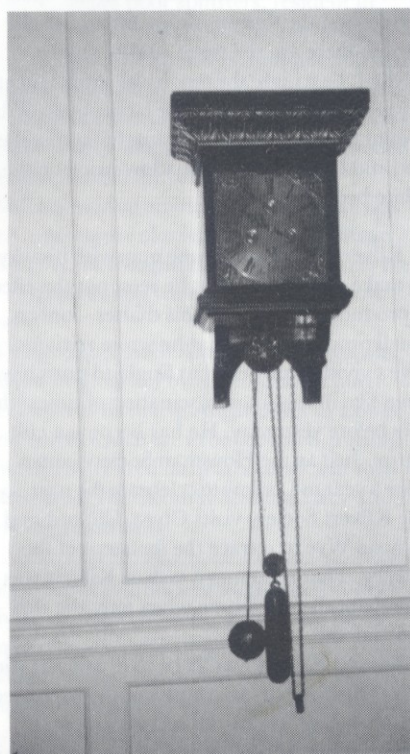
It was the end of an era when the steam trains stopped running between Hereford and Shrewsbury – stopping at all the little stations – Leebotwood – Onibury and so on. There was a connection from the London train at Shrewsbury getting into Ludlow about 10.30. If I remember rightly the ticket collector had an oil lamp with a little chain attached. The clerk in the booking office would ring up for a taxi. When the change came, why, why were the buildings pulled down – they could have been put to some use? The ladies' waiting room at the end of the platform could have been made into an ideal bed-sitter for any young person – now there is a rather miserable shelter – not much protection when the wild north-easter blows.

But I am profoundly thankful we still have a rail service – we are much more fortunate than many comparable places.

A change in Ludlow I cannot grieve over

and that is the demolition of the town hall. I had a grandstand view of it at the end – I did not mind having to dust and dust for days. I felt thankful I had lived to see the square empty. I admit the hall had its uses – concerts – sales and meetings. There used to be auction sales – by no means all up-market, but now and then something would catch the eye. And one day amidst old bedsteads – garden tools and odd crockery, there was a clock looking very disconsolate. He was adopted and became well loved – he was a hooded wall clock with a gilded parapet – like a wig – reminiscent of Queen Anne's treasurer and so he was christened Godolphin. He was made by W. Atkinson, Malton, Yorkshire. We have another clock inherited from an uncle in Surrey. Poor thing, he had a bad time in London during the war and lost his glass front and sides. On his face was Payne – Ludlow. He has survived and ticks away peacefully as if to say 'this is my own, my native land'.

Though the old town hall has gone there are several other places where auctions are held, and many interesting items come up for sale. But I do wonder if there will ever be another Godolphin.



'Godolphin'

I was very thrilled when I first came to Ludlow to have a fair outside my front door. I do hope the people of Ludlow will fight, fight and fight again to keep it in the town. After all, it is only here for four days in the year. It would be sad to banish it to some meadow half a mile away.

In spite of the ups and downs of the last thirty-odd years I can say with the psalmist 'The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places'.

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The Welsh Marches – From the Bookshelf

Mary Webb wrote about the Shropshire Lakes and the Stiperstones in 'Precious Bane' and 'Gone to Earth', A. E. Housman wrote 'A Shropshire Lad' and, by so doing, put the county on the map while Francis Kilvert, the Curate of Clyro, on the borders of what was Radnorshire and is now Hereford and Worcester, wrote about the southern marches. Thus a romantic novelist, a poet and a diarist have combined to sing the praises of the Borderland. Mary Webb suffered from hot, literary, flushes (she died from Bright's disease, one of the symptoms of which is a heightened imagination), Housman was a cold fish (he was described by a fellow don whom he had undoubtedly once offended as 'descended from a long line of maiden aunts'), and Kilvert was a marvellous 'camera', a reporter who chronicled the every-day affairs of the border in the 1870s. Let me give you an extract from his diary:

1870, 9 June

'in the night there came a cooler wind and fair showers out of the west. The falling white blossoms of the clematis drift in at the open window on the fresh morning breeze. In the garden there are red roses, and blue hills beyond. Last night the moon was shining in at my west window through the lacing bows of the mountain ash – the moonbeams fell across the bed and I saw 'the gusty shadow sway' on the white bed curtain. . . .'

Kilvert, who was a young man with his way to make, described what he sees, not the effect it produces on him, and his diaries – only a small proportion of what he wrote remains, give a vivid picture of what England must have been like in that most fascinating of times, the day before yesterday. He has become a cult figure. Just as the Housman Society comes once a year to Ludlow to celebrate the past, so the Kilvert Society visits Clyro, Clifford and Hay on Wye to retrace the footsteps of the master. That is no mean task as Kilvert was a famous walker at a time when only the rich rode horses.

Francis Kilvert was 29 in 1870 and the son of a Wiltshire parson whose family originated in Shropshire. He died nine years later at Bredwardine, of peritonitis, two years after his marriage. It was the age before antibiotics. His diaries only came to light in the late 'thirties. Kilvert came to Clyro when the countryside was precisely at the peak of its beauty. The village communities were still intact, the country was not empty, which it is today, save perhaps in summer when the tourists come, and farm machinery with its noise, very rare indeed. There was no traffic on the unmetalled roads. Short distances were covered on foot: long ones by train, for in the 1870s the branch lines had spread across England and Wales, lines that have now vanished. The fields were manicured, a landscape which was prosperous

and brought to perfection by the work of generations. The diaries are a marvellous read, but they might be taken with a copy of the book by A. L. Le Quesne called 'After Kilvert' (Oxford University Press). Le Quesne had the bright idea of spending a year in Clyro where he lived in Kilvert's old lodgings, and his book is a textual criticism of Kilvert's own work. He takes the comments of the diarist and relates them to the changes that have taken place over the past one hundred years. He makes the further point that Kilvert's diary has the rare quality of opening a window on the past otherwise totally unknown, a past that everybody would have assumed to be gone and forgotten beyond recall. Anyone who visits Shropshire, Hereford and the Marches today cannot fail to be excited by so acute and detailed a picture that is painted by Kilvert, and be fascinated by the inferences drawn from it by Le Quesne.

Kilvert is more than a brilliant reporter of sights and scenes. He is a chronicler. In 1870 he writes of an old man, William Pritchard, that '... he remembers the old house of Cefny Blaen and the large famous room which he says was 20 yards long and was used for holding a Court of Justice. . . . I asked him if he had ever heard any talk of Charles I ever having been about in this country. 'Oh yes,' he said, 'I have a jug that the king once drank out of at Blaen Cerdi. He had breakfast that day at Brecon, dined at Gwernyfed and slept at Harpton, passing through Newchurch. His army was with him and riding two and two in the narrow lanes the line reached from Pen Vaen in Newchurch, through the village up to Blaen Cerdi. At Blaen Cerdi all the farm people, boys and girls ran out to see the king pass. The king was afoot. He stopped opposite the house and asked my ancestress Mary Bayliss to give him something to drink. She went to the house and fetched him his milk and water in the jug which has been handed down with the tradition in my family. I have always heard that this Mary Bayliss was an extraordinarily fine beautiful woman. . . .'

Le Quesne pinpoints this account of a royal visit to August 1645, when Charles, defeated at Naseby, retreated into South Wales, and then struck north east in a desperate attempt to escape pursuit.

Kilvert and Le Quesne in their respective diaries both write of clear days when from the hills behind Clyro the Clee Hills and even the Caradoc at Stretton, forty miles away, are clearly visible. What advice would I give a stranger to the Welsh Border who was eager to pay a first visit?

Dip into the Victoria County History, buy Michael Raven's 'A Shropshire Gazetteer', and keep it in the car. The Shell Guide by John Betjeman and John Piper is hard to find: as one might expect Betjeman puts the stress upon churches, and his opinions are idiosyncratic. Buy an Ordnance Survey map. Do not forget

a copy of the 'Good Food Guide' for good restaurants are much rarer in remote England than they are smarter counties like Surrey and Hampshire. Make Ludlow your headquarters, and keep off the main roads. Take your courage in both hands and turn off the main roads, follow lanes to their bitter/sweet ends, and, when the sun shines, picnic in the lee of great hills with Housman's coloured counties spread out beneath your feet.

Visit the great houses and take your Betjeman to church. Rummage in the antique shops of Ludlow and Leominster for early Staffordshire pots, and elderly barometers. Have lunch in pubs, and listen to the soft accents of the locals. Buy a clematis at 'Treasure's' of Tenbury Wells and plant it in your suburban garden. Ask in Ludlow for the butcher's shop that sells the best sausages. Try to imagine what Shropshire and Hereford were like before the Great War when the gentry lived lives of leisure in great houses with servants, the farmers were all tenants, and the farm labourers struggled desperately to make ends meet. There was once no poverty like rural poverty. Since then, machinery has taken the place of the ploughman, and the comfortably retired have bought up, and tarted up, many of the cottages. The gentry have retreated into their houses, and the great estates, like the Grove near Craven Arms where my uncles worked, have been broken up, their tenants snapping up their cottages in the early 'fifties for what now appears to have been practically nothing. The juggernaut has displaced the train, and the motor car, the horse; or, rather, the working horse. Distances have shrunk and dialects softened. But the beauty of the country remains: the tawny whale back of the Long Mynd, the blue arrogance of the distant Clec, its back turned against the unkind Midlands, and lush, red lands of Hereford. Read Kilvert in bed, and Housman when you return home. Go quickly before it is too late, and Telford New Town absorbs all of Shropshire.

Julian Critchley, M.P.

President, Ludlow Civic Society

After Kilvert - Le Quesne - published by Oxford University Press (out of print - March 1990)
Kilvert's Diary - available in Penguin at £4.95
 Three-volume hard-back at £35.00
 and one-volume hard-back (selections) £12.95
A Shropshire Gazetteer by Michael Raven is available at £9.95
Good Food Guide - £11.95

Once again we have to apologise for the non appearance of a promised article. David Heath of English Heritage was seriously injured in a road accident during November, and has only returned to his duties. We very much hope that when he has had time to clear the backlog of work which has built up in his absence, he will be able to produce the article on Ludford House which we know our members are most anxious to read.

Louisa Powell Almshouses

As editors we must apologise to readers for errors which occurred in Heritage News - September 1989. In her article, Dorothy Arrowsmith gave details of the will of Louisa Powell, the final sentence of which was 'lost' in editing. The paragraph should have read -

In her will, Louisa Powell made generous bequests to several charities and to her servants. The servants' portions being increased from time to time by codicils to the will. Her barouche, gig, and one other vehicle, she left to a manservant. A sum of money was used to maintain the painted commemorative window to her mother in Diddlebury church. The residue of her personal estate and effects was to be used to provide the inmates with a weekly sum of money or food in lieu.

A further correction to the article has been made by Mr Ian A. Slater, a life member of the Society whose firm acts as clerks to the Dr Lang Trust.

The Dr Lang Trust and the Louisa Powell Almshouses Trust are different Trusts.

The Dr Lang Trust was founded by the will of Dr James Giles Lang who died in 1937. The income from the Trust Fund is to be divided between twenty poor spinsters, resident in Ludlow, who have attained the age of sixty.

The reason why spinsters, and not married women or widows are eligible is that Dr Lang was moved by the plight of spinsters who stay at home to look after their parents and are left stranded when their parents die.

Dr Lang was an eminent naturalist. He was given a doctorate of science by an American University, in recognition of his eminence. He ran a drapers shop where Woolworths now stands.

The Louisa Powell Almshouses Trust was founded by Louisa Powell of Sutton Court. The Trustees have five Almshouses in Lower Corve Street which are to be occupied, putting it shortly, by retired farm labourers and their widows from Diddlebury, Stanton Lacy and adjoining parishes.

The Ludlow Civic Society was formed in 1954 with the declared object of protecting the unique character of Ludlow.

Membership is open to all who are in sympathy with the aims of the Society, and is in no way confined to Ludlovians; indeed it has members world-wide, as well as nation-wide. The membership begins on 1 April of each year.

Members of the public wishing to join the Society should contact The Secretary, 1 Cliff Villas, Ludford, Ludlow. Telephone Ludlow 872006.

The article on Ludlow Museum was prepared with reference to: *The History of Ludlow Museum 1933 - 1983* by David Lloyd

We hope you have enjoyed this edition of the newsletter - made possible by the generosity of those who have advertised on these pages. We hope you will support them as they have supported us.

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Margaret McMillan 1860 – 1931

Some readers may know that High Hall, part of the present Ludlow College, was built during the late 18th century as a town house for the Rogers family of Stannage Park. They may also know that for a while, during the end of the 19th century, the house served as the Rectory for the Rev. Ffarrington Clayton and his family.

The Rev. Ffarrington Clayton, while Chairman of the Governors of the then Grammar School, had enormous influence over his fellow Governors. It is reported that in 1893, he argued, successfully, that the ten scholarships then available for poorer boys, should not be increased as there was little local demand.

At least ten years before this event, Margaret McMillan was engaged as a governess to the children of the household. Perhaps she saw something of this attitude towards the less fortunate which made her examine her own life style – in later years she was reported to have told friends that it was while working as a governess that she underwent a profound religious experience which changed her life.

Margaret left employment as a governess, and tried her hand at assisting her sister Rachel in a hostel for working girls in London. Her efforts were not appreciated, and she found employment as a social secretary to Lady Meux. For a short time, a career as an actress was considered. However, the attractions of life as a socialite soon wore thin, and Margaret McMillan turned from trivia to the needs of deprived society. Involvement with Socialist organisations caused friction between Margaret and her staunchly Conservative employer.

Things came to a head in 1892 when Lady Meux discovered her protegee had made a speech at Hyde Park on May Day supporting

the London dockers in a wage claim. Margaret was given the choice of leaving her safe employment and the possibility of theatrical fame, or continuing her fight for the socialist cause.

Margaret McMillan was invited to Bradford to work full time for the Socialist Party. She supported herself by writing and became seriously involved in education when she was elected to a place on the Bradford School Board. Here she came face to face with the appalling conditions of many families – the conditions of children in child labour, especially those young children who were 'half timers' (children who from the age of 11 spent half the day in the woollen mill and half in school). Such children were too tired to apply themselves to learning, were often undernourished, and came from families where facilities were such that personal hygiene left much to be desired.

Fighting hard and long for improved conditions for the poorest families in Bradford; Margaret had to resign from the school board in 1902 on health grounds. She needed rest, and returned south to live with her sister who had become a peripatetic teacher of hygiene in Kent and was living in Bromley.

On her recovery, Margaret McMillan threw herself into the struggle for a state system of school meals, medical inspection and treatment, plus better conditions for teaching of hygiene. In 1904 she was invited to become manager of a group of schools in Deptford. It was in Deptford she started as a private enterprise the now famous open air nursery school which became a pattern for the state system.

Margaret soon realised that an unhealthy neglected toddler could not hope to compete with a child from a clean, well nourished

background where parents, or other adults (nanny, governess, au pair) were continually on hand to stimulate and care.

She first opened a medical treatment centre in 1910 in a church hall, known locally as the clinic – it provided a medical 'nursery' where treatment was given after school hours to arrest disease at the earliest possible stage. Money was donated from various sources for the centre.

It was soon realised that the cure for these diseases depended upon improved living conditions, and an understanding of the need for personal cleanliness. Having made her views known, Margaret McMillan was offered a house rent free by John Evelyn. Naming this Evelyn House, Margaret used it for minor operations where a stay of two or three days was sometimes necessary. The garden, she used as a night camp for girls, initially from the age of 6-14 years. The beneficial affect of being away from overcrowded insanitary homes soon became obvious, and a similar camp for boys was opened in a graveyard nearby. Before long, toddlers were also admitted to the camps.

Both Rachel and Margaret saw that open air education (as far as possible) was a successful experiment. The fresh air giving the young people improved health and as healthier children, they developed their natural curiosity which is such a stimulus to learning.

The school expanded from this site to an area of ground owned by the LCC and earmarked for a new elementary school. The MacMillans retained the site for a period of almost 20 years.

The work of the school had an enormous affect on the people of this very depressed area. Initially, greeted with suspicion, overworked mothers soon saw the benefits of sending their children to the school. Margaret realised the importance of working with parents, and encouraging parental responsibility. Her teachers were encouraged to visit the homes of their charges and understand fully the difficulties under which they fought to survive. It was accepted, that especially in families where parents were out all day at work, the school filled a vital part of the life of the child.

The school opened at 8.00 am for bathing and washing of children. 9.00 am breakfast. 10.00 – 11.00 am educational work of various kinds (lessons). 11.00 am break for toilets and washing. 11.30 am dinner time for toddlers (followed by rest). 11.45 am dinner time for older children (followed by rest 12.30 – 2.30). 2.30 – 3.00 pm washing and recreation. 3.00 – 4.00 pm walk or educational visit (handwork or toys if wet). 4.00 pm tea, children collected at various times. 4.30 – 5.30 pm free work by children. 5.30 pm school closed

Thus for most of the working day, the child was cared for and stimulated in some way, encouraging educational progress. Teachers were trained to her methods at the Rachel McMillan Training Centre which opened in 1931. Margaret McMillan also believed strongly in 'in service' training, she instituted

a very flexible timetable with specific times for eating and sleeping, but 'learning' according to the interests of children and the discretion of the teacher.

Her work was honoured in the foundation of the Margaret McMillan Memorial College in Bradford where she started on her work of educational reform, officially opened in October 1956. The College was renamed Trinity as part of the newly formed Bradford and Ilkley Community College in 1975. However, as a result of pressure by local people in Bradford, the Trinity Building was renamed in 1984 to ensure that Margaret McMillan, who spoke of Bradford as 'the city of my heart' should never be forgotten in the area where she started upon her campaign of reform.

Neither should she be forgotten in Ludlow, where it is likely she had her first ideas of what she wanted to do with her life.

Joan Nash

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With further notes provided by Pat Couzens of the Bradford and Ilkley Community College.

Since this article was prepared, a new biography of Margaret McMillan has been published by Routledge – Portrait of a Pioneer by Elizabeth Bradburn.

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worthy of the dreams of John Harley. Last autumn, Dr Peter Toghil, Vice-President of the Shropshire Geological Society, spoke to members, appropriately enough at the Fred Reeves Memorial Lecture, on Recent Developments in the Interpretation of the Geology of the Area – his book – *Geology in Shropshire* – has been published recently by the Swan Hill Press. Dr Toghil points out at the beginning that 'The geology of Shropshire is more varied than any other area of comparable size in Britain, and perhaps the world... The variety of Shropshire's rocks and fossils has attracted geologists since the early nineteenth century, including many eminent academics and countless numbers of students. Nowadays the general public is also becoming more and more interested in geology and there is also an ever-growing number of knowledgeable amateurs.

Shortage of funds and lack of enthusiasm on the part of those of us who live in the south of the County have held up the very welcome proposal to create a geological centre in the area. I very much hope the 1990s will see a change of attitude and progress in the provision of such a cultural asset.

All is not yet lost, the Museum will be moving to the Assembly Rooms, albeit a very small part, with first-rate access for the public. An amenity for both local people and tourists – something which will very much add to the attraction of the town, and encourage visitors.

Joan Nash

The Feathers at Ludlow

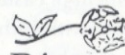


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THE MUSEUM AT LUDLOW

The Museum at Ludlow appears always to have had a 'space' problem. In the very early days the Ludlow Natural History Society was feeling very cramped and a sub-committee was formed to 'investigate the provision of more spacious and eligible premises'. Premises were eventually found in conjunction with those of the 'New Building Committee' – now known as the Assembly Rooms, and former Bikold premises.

The massive amount of space available for display meant that a large collection of 'specimens and curiosities' was built up during the years between 1840 and 1914. As a visitor from the Cambrian Archaeological Society (1898) is quoted as saying 'Here were seen a good collection of Silurian fossils and a few miscellaneous antiquities, the arrangement of which leaves much to be desired'.

During this period, the 'visitor' system did not encourage any but the serious student (subscribing members of the Society could visit at any time – others, 'by arrangement'). There was no encouragement of casual visitors who might have been fired with enthusiasm for the remote past – had they but had access.

As members of the Ludlow Natural History Society came to second and third generation so enthusiasm faded – 'volunteer' curators were impossible to find, and eventually, with just eight members left, in 1937 – desperate, with expensive premises in need of urgent repairs, the Society made a resolution that 'the Society offer the whole of the contents of the Museum to the Shropshire County Council. Discussions dragged on for some time (nothing appears to take a normal time in Ludlow) and agreement was not reached until 1940. However, an indication of how bad things had become is to be found in the report of a representative of the British Museum in 1940 – 'Many of the objects as now displayed are of interest to nobody while others, such as the fossils, are comprehensible only to experts'.

The Natural History Society was wound up in 1941 and care of the Museum passed into the hands of the County Council. Everyone had other things on their minds during the 1940s and both exhibits and the building were allowed to stagnate further. It was not until the early 1950s and recovery from war time that there was any interest in the Museum. Ludlovians were fortunate that Father Kelly, who arrived at St Peter's in 1946, Fred Reeves, a founder of the Civic Society, Violet Packer, borough councillor, and Marion Wisdom, the borough treasurer worked together to found what was essentially a new museum. Their first decision was removal from the old museum building. 'It was expensive to maintain, poorly lit' and 'public access was difficult'. First priority was a centrally placed, easily maintained venue. The room over the Buttercross, owned by the town council, was available and arrangements were made to lease it to the County Council for the use of the Museum Service. Eventually, John Norton

was appointed in 1959 to oversee the development of Ludlow Museum.

The museum grew both in collections and reputation. Previously, much of the Mill Street collection had been dispersed throughout the country, however, as the reputation of the museum in Ludlow grew, so did its collection – once again there was a storage problem. The County Council bought (1968) the former fire station in Old Street, this was used for storage, and housed (almost) the complete reference section. There was also a lecture room available for both local and visiting groups.

The collection continued to grow, and once again, there was a need for more space. Fortunately for the museum in Ludlow, the buildings of the former County Junior School were vacated in July 1972, and it was agreed the premises should be retained and used by the Museum Service. At the end of 1973 the Museum 'moved' again – the 'show case' remaining at the Buttercross, and the major collections and research sections at Old Street.

Over the last fifteen years the work of the museum in Ludlow has continued to flourish – for example, by 1979 the geological reference section contained some 30,000 specimens, and is in constant use by researchers. The Biological Records Centre at Ludlow has also made great progress – all the collections being catalogued on a nationally agreed scheme.

Thus, the research side of the Museum, available to those of us already 'hooked' on the past, has flourished; however, the 'showcase' at the Buttercross has not had the same success. Great efforts have been put into the displays, however, the major problem is no doubt that of access.

Many years ago (but things do take a long time to happen in Ludlow) John Harley, an Old Ludlovian, spoke to the scholars of the Grammar School – 'There lies in this limited area a succession of rocks of world-wide celebrity and interest, associated with the honoured names of Lewis of Aymestrey, Lloyd, Salwey, Marston, Lightbody, and others of Ludlow who with the help of Murchison in bringing their labours into one connected view have made Ludlow the classic home and field of geology. This is your inheritance; cherish it; bring it to a more perfect knowledge of these works, and continue to make your Museum their exponent'.

At the time of the 150th birthday celebrations of Ludlow Museum, the County Council Leisure and Activities Committee decided to buy the former Assembly Rooms in the town as a Museum/Library complex. (The then Secretary of the Civic Society – Ran Ogston – was a prime mover in these proceedings). Members of the Civic Society were privileged when Geoffrey McCabe, the County Museums and Arts Officer, addressed a meeting on the work of the museum service in the county, and explained what was proposed for this site. A development truly

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