

Ludlow Heritage News

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FREE

LUDLOW'S BAD LUCK?

A celebration of
the old Town Hall

Watercolour by Graham Rawlings

2011 marks the 25th anniversary of the demolition of the Ludlow Town Hall. It was famously referred to as 'Ludlow's bad luck' by Nikolaus Pevsner. This commemorative edition of Heritage News will not attempt to explain the reasons for its demolition, but will celebrate the Town Hall which is still fondly remembered by many Ludlow people, and recall the many civic and social functions that took place in the building which was at the centre of Ludlow life for over ninety years. It was built by Henry Arthur Cheers, 1853-1916, more popularly known as Harry Cheers of Twickenham.

THE END OF THE TOWN HALL AS RECORDED IN HERITAGE NEWS

The front page of Heritage News in May 1986 was dominated by an article entitled 'Goodbye Town Hall' by Howard Cheese. The piece began by informing readers that the demolition of the Town Hall must have been the most recorded event (at that time)

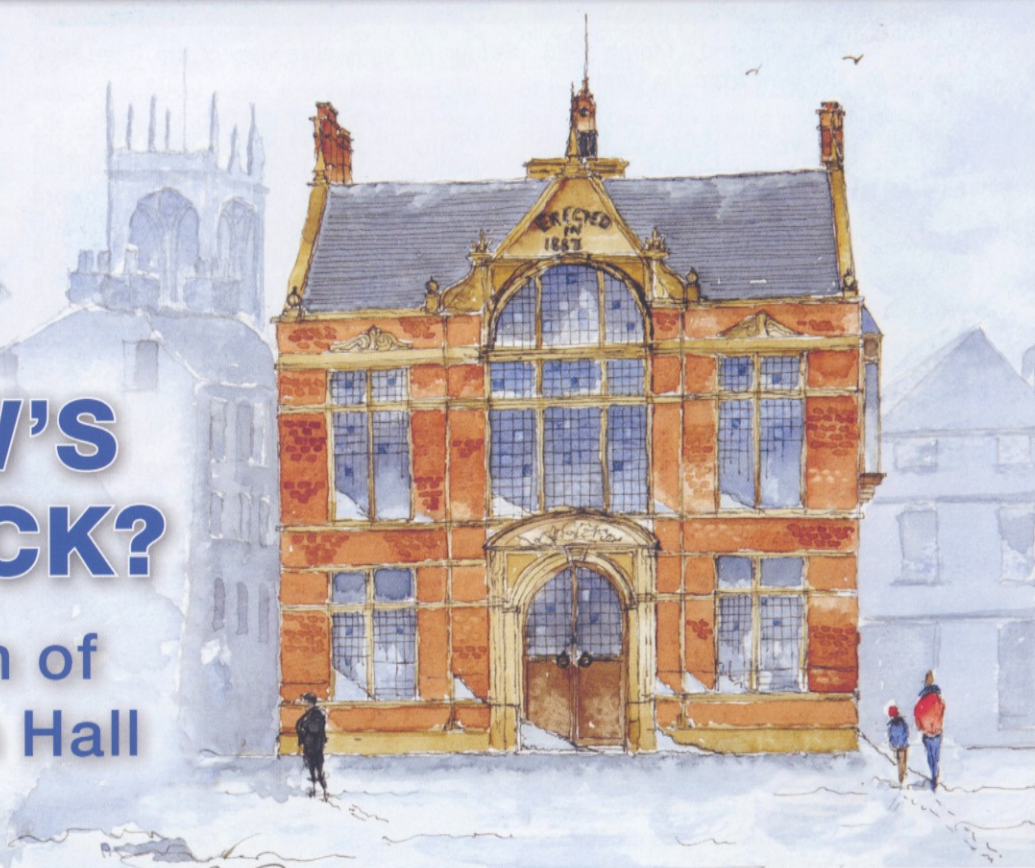
in the history of Ludlow. 'I doubt if any other event in the history of Ludlow has been so well recorded as the demolition of our only large Victorian building.' The author went on to inform readers that the date on the keystone, 1887, was 'a blatant lie placed there as the building was designed to commemorate the Queen's Jubilee'. The piece reported the views of several townspeople reflecting the opposing camps about the fate of the Town Hall. One said, 'It's sad to see it go' while another said, 'It's rather a blessing.' Howard Cheese concluded by remarking that the square had reverted almost to its original layout: 'If we go back far enough, of course, the site was part of a much larger Market Place.'

By the October 1986 edition, thoughts had moved on from the demolition itself to what to do with the newly-acquired open space. Indeed, one member, Dennis Flanders, had sent in his drawing of the square complete with a stone obelisk. While the Civic Society argued, and still argues, that the square should be 'building free', a concerned, heretical minority led by

Stephen Dornan argued that 'Ludlow would gain aesthetically from the rebuilding of a market hall.'

In the April 1987 edition the Society was firmly behind the idea of keeping the square open, and the leader argued 'I do not believe that Ludlow has yet to come to grips with the implications of the immense bonus of space that has been conferred upon it.' The author went on to say that the square had been used for a variety of open-air events over the Christmas period including 'a wondrous inflated dragon on which the youngsters were able to bounce about'. Society member, David Baron, wrote in support of the open space: 'Ludlow people, generally speaking, seem to approve of the Market Square as it is. Let it not be destroyed by Building.'

The September 1987 edition of Heritage News contained a skit on the Town Hall by Derrick Banks 'The Town Hall or the Stately Pleasure Dome by a Bewildered Burgess (with apologies to the late great Stanley Holloway)' which ended 'But I pray and I pray most devoutly that





Above: Nearing the end - March 1986 Below: An early side view of the Town Hall.
Opposite: The view from the Castle

they leave the fine square as it is.' Recently the Civic Society have been re-showing as part of their Church Walk campaign the BBC 1984 production of Blott on The Landscape. Many of the key early scenes were filmed in and around the Town Hall.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE VICTORIAN TOWN HALL

The Town Hall as a distinct architectural identity has a long history, originating in the somewhat humble buildings found in market squares, usually consisting of an open lower floor used for trade, and an upper enclosed area used for administration and, increasingly, entertainments. Local examples found in this area include the work of John Abel at Leominster, 1633. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the development of three distinct forms of communal hall: the Guild Hall for the dispensing of justice, as at Worcester by Thomas White, 1721-24; the Assembly Rooms for entertainment, as at Bath by John Wood the elder, 1769; and the covered market or corn exchange for commerce, as at Leeds by Cuthbert Broderick, 1861-63.

By the middle of Victoria's reign

there had been a huge expansion in the populations of cities and towns. Indeed the 1851 census was the first to record over 50% of the population living in urban areas. These rapidly expanding towns had increased wealth which meant that the town halls began to take on a much more symbolic role as towns and patrons tried to create both a lasting architectural legacy and to outshine the next town. It is such elements of public display which so characterized the 19th century town hall.

The Municipal Reform Act of 1835 established in one go 178 new municipal corporations which had to have premises in which to carry out the functions of the elected local governments. Other local



government acts of 1882, 1888 and 1894 increased the spread of these municipal corporations. As the century progressed, numerous pieces of legislation ranging from the Public Health Act of 1848 to the Police Act of 1856, meant a growth in the number of functions corporations needed to take on board, increasing the need for even larger and centrally located accommodation.

The Victorian town hall building boom can be roughly divided into two distinct periods. The early town halls, including Liverpool's St. George's Hall by H.L. Elmes, 1841-56, Leeds Town Hall by Cuthbert Broderick, 1853-58, and Manchester Town Hall by Alfred Waterhouse, 1867-77, were very much one-off statements of civic pride, and included the best materials, specially commissioned interior details and fine art work. Those built during the second part of Victoria's reign and beyond tended to be more mundane in design and more mechanical in construction. The work of Harry Cheers is best seen in the context of this latter strand.

It was not only in the large urban areas that such grand edifices were built, but smaller towns such as Ludlow vied with each other to produce bigger and better town halls. The way architects were awarded a commission was through entering a competition, and these projects really fired the imaginations of Victorian architects. For the Manchester Town Hall competition, won by Alfred Waterhouse, there were over 136 entries. The distinguished architect E.W. Goodwin submitted designs for nine competitions, the same number as Harry Cheers.

A QUESTION OF STYLE

The earliest Victorian town halls were built in a restrained classical style as at Mansfield by James and W.A. Nicholson, 1835-6, and at Burslem by G.T. Robinson, 1852-7. This was replaced in the 1860s by the Gothic as with E.W. Goodwin at Northampton, 1861-

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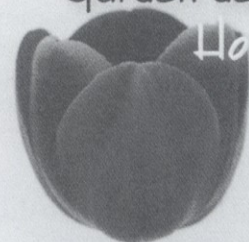


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64, and the aforementioned Manchester Town Hall, with an occasional essay in Queen Anne Revival, as at Leicester by F.J.Hames, 1874-76. As the century continued, the style favoured can be broadly referred to as eclectic with references to the 'Jacobean', 'Elizabethan' and 'Renaissance' styles among others, as seen in Sheffield Town Hall by E.W.Mountford, 1890-97. It is into this eclectic mode that the work of Harry Cheers falls. At the same time the Gothic remained popular, as did the classical style which developed into the Edwardian Neo-Baroque as at Stockport by Alfred Brumwell Thomas, 1904-08.

Stanton Stephens

A MATTER FOR CELEBRATION — A NEW MARKET HALL FOR LUDLOW

Historical research is a combination of dogged persistence and the occasional moment of illumination. It was while researching the civic life of Heber Rickards, the founder of the ironmongery business in the Bull Ring, that I discovered the minutes of 'The Rejoicings Committee of the Queen's Jubilee'. Like many of his fellow town dignitaries, Heber Rickards was part of the group that made the decision in 1887 to demolish the existing Market Hall, built in 1702, and replace it with a new building.

The story of the planning and construction of the Market Hall, which was itself demolished in 1986, contains elements that we recognise from our own times. Public consultation was an important issue, with the necessity to raise money by subscription and loans, followed by the increasing costs to the original estimate, complaints about the standard of building and its completion in time for the grand opening in October 1889.

The process began with a public meeting called for 7th January 1887 at which it was resolved 'that it is desirable to celebrate the Jubilee of Her Most Gracious

Majesty the Queen in a permanent manner'. A committee was appointed which met later in the same month and agreed that a new Market Hall should be that permanent memorial. From this point onwards there were two concerns for the representatives to address, one being the immediate celebration of the Jubilee in 1887, and the other being the planning and construction of the new building. The original committee expanded to a group of 169 people representing every aspect of Ludlow life, including magistrates, charity trustees, the Highways Board, members of the Town Council, plus named individuals such as the Rector. It was not long before smaller sub-committees were appointed, and by the autumn of 1887 the Town Council was making preparations for the new building.

This article concentrates on the means by which the Town Council achieved their aim of providing a new Market Hall. Their original estimate of £5000 for the building was described later as a 'conjectural' figure. Subscriptions raised through the efforts of the original committee had amounted only to about £1400, so it was necessary to appeal to the Treasury through the Local Government Board for a loan of £4000. Understandably, the Treasury wanted more accurate figures, and the scheme envisaged by the Town Council was advertised for architects to submit plans and costings. The new building would include a general market on the ground floor, plus a police station with two cells, kitchen and toilet facilities. The first floor, to be known as the Corn Exchange, would be suitable for public meetings, with a surveyor's office and a council chamber.

The architect chosen was Henry Cheers of Twickenham, whose firm was called 'Straight and True'. A joint committee consisting of members from the Council and the Jubilee Committee had to negotiate the discussions with Henry Cheers when it became obvious that the plan was too

ambitious. One comment made by the Committee is interesting in the light of the building that was actually erected: 'The Council does not bind competitors to any particular architecture but preference will be given to the Queen Anne style.' The Treasury prevaricated for several months as they were not sure under which local government rules the loan could be made, but they finally consented to the first loan of £4000 and then a further loan of £1700 when costs escalated.

Meanwhile the Home Office had intervened by demanding that if there were cells provided for prisoners there must also be a courtyard for exercise. This resulted in lengthy discussions over the small number of prisoners that might need the cells, and the fact that they would only be held for a short time between the arrival of the train



from Shrewsbury and the opening of the court sessions. Finally it was agreed that cells were not required. The specification for the building had called for 'best red pressed brick' and Cheers wanted Ruabon bricks. However, in view of the extra cost, these were only to be used for facing bricks, but in August 1889 there was a complaint that they had not been used on the gable ends.

While the Council met each month to hear reports on the building from the Borough Surveyor and Henry Cheers, who were jointly responsible for the supervision of the project, they had to contend with strong local feeling. Cheers had decided that the masonry from the old building could be ground down to add to the (Cont'd Page 6)

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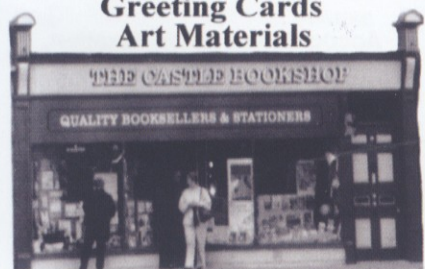


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COMPETITIONS

During the day, morning and afternoon, individual choirs from Shropshire schools performed, and at 8 pm it was the turn of the winners again. I think there were no prizes. Special staging was constructed on the stage of the Town Hall. It took two hours to get all of the 500 children on to it. If any fainted, they had to be lowered through the scaffolding on ropes! As well as the 500, there was a big audience.

Cyril Cheese

My memory is from the early 60s. I attended Peggy Archer's dancing school. She held an annual dance competition in the Town Hall, with competing schools from throughout the Midlands. We always looked forward to taking part in the Town Hall, when the dancing was judged by a professional adjudicator.



The proclamation of war, read from the Town Hall balcony, 1914



The keystone, dated 1887

THE INDOOR MARKET

The busy indoor market was held on the ground floor of the Town Hall with one aisle up and one aisle down. I remember being taken to the market to buy Christmas trees which were on display in the entrance lobby off the old Post Office Square.

TOWN HALL



Interior view, 1980 Photo: Howard Cheese



Brian Cole antiques sale, 1973

THE END OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

I remember as a small child being taken to a party in the Town Hall and being presented with a commemorative medal.

Dick Stephens

We held our wedding reception had to be out of the hall so that the Council even sent along the cake. None of the guests chose to



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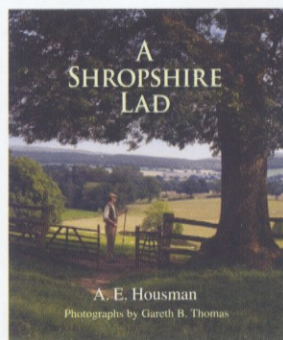
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MEMORIES

SOCIAL EVENTS

The very large main hall could accommodate several hundred people. It formed a fantastic backdrop for wedding receptions. The floor was great for dancing. And a variety of dance styles were regularly performed there, from folk dancing in the 1950s to disco, Northern Soul and punk style dancing in the 1970s.

Friday night dances in the Town Hall. Ballroom dancing there was a joy – remember that great sprung floor, many happy memories of the 'last waltz'.

Back in the 1970s, the interior decoration was beginning to look a little worse for wear. After much discussion the Council decided to spend what was then a great deal of money on redecorating the main hall.

The work took several weeks to complete, but was finished just in time for the arrival in town of the Radio 1 Club.

This was a lunchtime radio show aimed at young music fans. It was midsummer and a red hot day, and what seemed like hundreds crammed themselves into the hall to dance to music played by the famous DJ.

The result? Walls streaming with condensation and a ruined, costly paint job.

The hall was for many years the place to hold an event – from dances to whist drives, from public meetings to blood donor sessions.

Of course, that meant there was often a lot of competition to get a booking!
 tion there. A really nice 'do'. Only problem was that we the music could be set up for an evening event. And the retaker to make sure we all left in good time!
 o stay on for the dance.



"Kismet" - East Hamlet Dramatics Society, 1936



The Ballroom at the end of the Boer War



Display of folk spinning and weaving, May 1915

DRAMA

During the 1970s the Ludlow amateur Dramatic Society produced an annual children's play towards the end of January. I remember the Broad Street Methodist Sunday School having a yearly outing to the show which we looked forward to very much. The Town Hall would be full of children from all over South Shropshire.

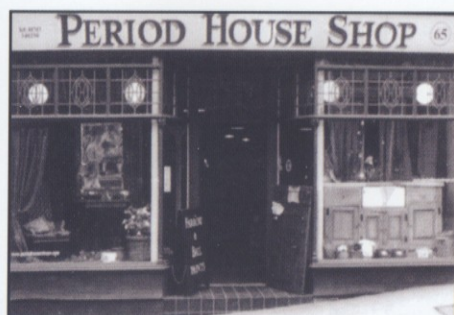
I was about 12 or 13 when I was suggested for a small part in Marlowe's 'Edward II' – a professional production in the Castle, but, if wet, in the Town Hall. It turned out to be a pretty wet summer.

John Westbrook was a classical actor of some repute, and with a voice that rumbled from the depths of his chest, played the petulant monarch.

One wet night, in the Town Hall, while taking the final curtain call, he pushed me forward into the limelight to take my own bow. The audience went into raptures for Mrs Jones's little boy – I knew most of them. Stardom at last!

In my adulthood I now realise John Westbrook knew how to get applause.

This edition of Ludlow Heritage News has been compiled with invaluable help from Howard Cheese, Daphne Jones, the Ludlow Museum and Robert Youngs of the Twickenham Museum.



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new mortar, and this involved an 'engine' in Castle Square to carry out the work. The Rector, living in what is now Ludlow College, was one of the several signatories who found this process dirty, noisy and 'intolerable'. The contractor agreed to put hoardings round the engine, but this took some time to achieve. Much time was also required to discuss the fittings, lighting and furniture for the new building.

There was discussion over the inscription to be placed on the building, but the original idea of putting all the Corporation members' names was dismissed. A Latin inscription was also rejected, and the final wording simply recorded the date of the laying of the stone by the Mayor and the date of opening. This proved to be 17th October 1889, and the dignitary who agreed to perform this ceremony was the Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire, the Honourable Lieutenant Colonel Windsor Clive. There had been invitations to the Prince of Wales and Lord Windsor who both declined. In early October the Council were not pleased that the building was still incomplete, but the festivities were planned for the day including a lunch and a gold key to be given to Colonel Windsor Clive.

By the end of October 1889 the Council could decide on the rental charges for the use of the premises, including market stalls and a request by the Rector to use one of the rooms for a Sunday School at a rate of £5 per year. He would also be responsible for ensuring that the children did not damage the building. The new Market Hall was in place, and its role in Ludlow public life would become part of the experience of local residents over the next ninety-seven years. The final act was to disband the Celebrations Committee on 1st November, and in that same month a long letter was sent to Queen Victoria expressing the congratulations and respect of the people of Ludlow and describing the way in which they had commemorated her Jubilee.

Jean Brown

EAST HAM 1 LUDLOW TOWN 0

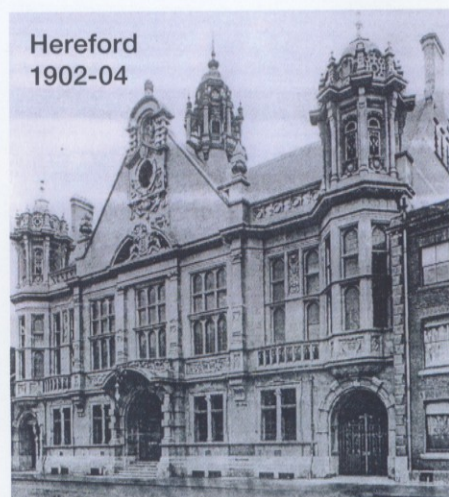
Two other town halls designed by Harry Cheers

Hereford Town Hall

The old town hall, referred to as the market hall, designed by John Abel c.1620, was demolished in 1862 provoking much national and local anger. However, it was not until 1900 that a committee was set up to look into providing a central space for the now spread out accommodation of the City Council. The Council had been offered the plot of three houses in Owen Street by Miss Johnson and Mrs Gilpin in memory of their father, Richard Johnson, a town clerk between 1832 and 1868, with the proviso that they be used for municipal construction.

The design of the new Town Hall was thrown open to competitive tender, and 54 designs were submitted, with that of Harry Cheers being the winner. The design brief stipulated that the building should provide office accommodation, a suite of formal mayoral rooms, and a grand assembly hall reached by a formal staircase. The sum of £25,000 was allocated for the project, but the enterprise quickly overran and the final bill was £31,400. The Town Hall was built by the Hereford builder W.J.Bowes of Bath Street, the foundation stone being laid on 13th May 1902 by Princess Henry of Battenburg. The ceremony was sadly overshadowed by the death on the previous evening of the Mayor, E.E.Bosley, the originator of the plan.

Built of brick, with a slate roof and faced with terracotta mouldings, it is of symmetrical design with false balconies, with the city crest centrally located above the first floor windows. The building was to provide 'offices and chambers with distinct purposes for the various requirements of the municipal council'. The original layout was as follows: the basement was used by the lamp-lighting department of the gas works; the ground floor was used for the offices of the various council departments; the upper



floors consisted of the large assembly room, council chamber and mayoral parlour; the top floor was used as accommodation for the caretaker and his family.

Hereford Town Hall is a fine example of 'baroque' eclecticism. Julian Orbach in 'Victorian Architecture in Britain' refers to it as 'a crashing baroque presence clad in yellow terracotta'. Inside, a touch of the Art Nouveau can be seen in some of the stained glass windows.

EAST HAM TOWN HALL

with Joseph Smith and A.H.Campbell

This is his most famous work. Pevsner refers to it as 'the supreme example of the power and confidence of the Edwardian local authority'. In 1903, in a special editorial, the East Ham Mail argued 'Surely East Ham, with its population of 100,000 souls, must now take its place among the great towns of England...If small provincial towns with a population of 5,000 can erect and maintain town halls, East Ham, with its great and

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growing population, can afford one, and what is more to the point, should have one.'

The layout was to be very similar to that at Hereford, albeit on a larger scale, with the caretaker's accommodation on the top floor. The Council Chamber, the Assembly Hall and Mayoral suite were to be found on the middle floors. As at Hereford, the municipal offices occupied the ground floor. A competition was held in 1898 with eleven designs being submitted. The budget allocated for the project was £55,000. The structure was built with red bricks decorated with relief carvings in artificial stone, with Doulton terracotta dressing in a mix of 'Tudor', 'Elizabethan' and 'Baroque'. The complex is dominated by the clock tower with an open belfry with pinnacles. The decoration on the clock tower has certain touches of the Art Nouveau creeping into it. If you take away the tower, a marked similarity can be seen with Ludlow Town Hall, particularly the east façade. While Hereford had a

princess to lay the foundation stone, the cutting of the ribbon at East Ham was done by a Mr Edward Passmore, although all council employees and schoolchildren were given a day off. As the East Ham Mail reported on 7th February 1903, 'On a plot of ground which three years ago was a cabbage field, has arisen a magnificent building—a building which tells of the great improvements of the town during the past few years.'

Stanton Stephens

NOTES from the chairman

Yet again, the issue dominating our time and concern is the attempt to build five houses alongside St. Laurence's Church and the Reader's House.

On 26th January the application was heard by the Shropshire South Planning Committee and, following significant lobbying and the opportunity to speak at the meeting, it was refused by the Councillors. However, because it was said by the Planning Officer that refusal would in his opinion expose the Council to possible costs at any appeal, the application was referred to the Strategic Planning Committee, and it was as though the South Planning Committee had not met and voted!

At their meeting on 17th February, the Strategic Planning Committee voted to approve the application, this in spite of 200 objections from local people, and the objections from national and international experts, together with all the Ludlow organisations who commented on the proposal.

We are challenging this failure in local democracy using a number of routes and are

determined to make every effort to prevent the development.

The fall back position is St. Laurence's claim of ownership of the boundary wall of the site, which, if proved, will stop the development whatever the Council decide! The Civic Society is supporting the Church and will, through the local community, ensure that funds are available to meet their legal costs.

By the time we go to press, things may well have moved on, and, in particular, we are joining with Shropshire Council, outside of the planning environment, in an attempt to buy the land from the current owner. This would avoid a similar scheme appearing in the future, and provide the opportunity to create something sensitive to its location on part of the site, whilst maintaining the setting of both St. Laurence's and the Reader's House.

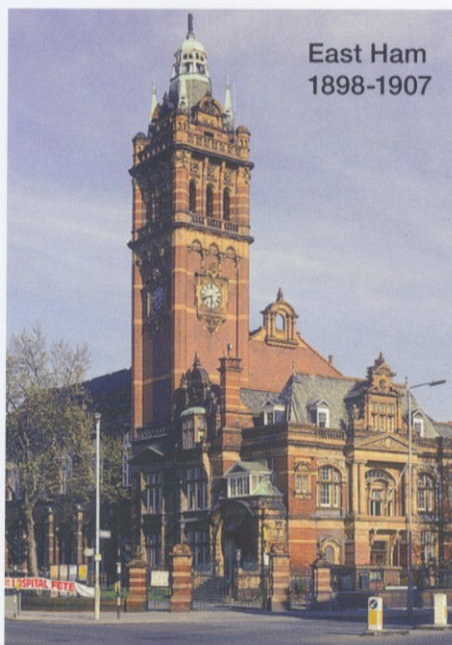
Members who have previously pledged financial support are asked to continue with their pledges, and we are inviting everyone to help us in stopping this unwanted development. Please contact me or our Treasurer for further details.

Enclosed with this publication is a fact sheet recording what has occurred, so that if we fail, at least everyone will know how such a development came about!!

It has been heartening to be working with members of the Society, and more particularly with the wider community, to oppose the scheme. It is unusual to have such unanimity of opinion.

The AGM takes place on 14th May and we hope that you will be able to be there to support the Committee. This year, after the formal business, we hope to start a debate on the future development of Ludlow, and this will provide an opportunity for our members to give us their views.

Beyond the immediate issue of the day, the Society continues to monitor and comment on significant planning applications, and works with other Ludlow



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organisations to support the Town. An initiative on reducing signage has been picked up by the Town Council, and should result in a reduction in unnecessary signs around the Town.

We are redesigning our website and hope this will provide a window on our activities, both for our members and other people interested in our Society. If you have an e-mail address, please let us know, as it will enable us to keep you in touch and make contact with you easier.

After three years as chairman, it is time for someone else to take the reins, and I look forward to supporting whoever is chosen. My thanks to everyone who has helped me.

John Nash

EVENTS

In March, the lecture to the Civic Society was given by Clive Richardson, author, historian and secretary of the Ludlow Historical Research Group, whose book 'Till Ludlow Tower shall Fall' was published in September. It tells the story of all the men on Ludlow First World War memorial. In April the lecture was given by Ted Maidment, historian, speaker and singer, and was a lecture with music, about La Bohème. In May there will be the AGM.

The following season will begin with Duncan White – third time lucky! He will be talking about country pottery. Other lectures planned include Gareth Owen, well known local poet, Jonathan Wood on houses in Farnham and Ludlow, and Arthur Milner on Damascus tiles and the Arts and Crafts Movement.

Prue Bellak

MEMBERSHIP

The Society has been delighted to welcome a number of new members since the last edition of Heritage News. Interest in and support for the Society appears to have been prompted by the high-profile battle being fought to resist the overdevelopment of Church Walk. We are very grateful for all the support the Society receives, financial and otherwise, and from all its members, old and new alike.

We are, of course, always anxious to increase our membership and happy to welcome new members at any time during the year. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you know of anyone who would like to join, and I will forward an application form. Alternatively, forms can be downloaded from the society's website – www.ludlowcivicsociety.org

Finally, thank you to all the members who have recently renewed their subscriptions, and I'd like to reassure any yet to do so that it's still not too late!

Rebecca Buteux



Responses to articles are always welcome. Please address your letters to:

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Dick Stephens
Philip Dunne M.P.

Chairman
Hon. Treasurer

John Nash
Tony Cant

Hon. Secretary Valerie Thomas

Committee Members

Prue Bellak, Ian Bott, Peter Burden,
Rebecca Buteux, Simon Buteux, Bill
Eastwell, Dan Lloyd, Tim Smith, Stanton
Stephens, Mike Wake.

IF YOU LOVE LUDLOW



here are six good reasons why you should join

LUDLOW CIVIC SOCIETY

1. An increased membership strengthens our influence in protecting this unique town.
2. We need your support in our fight against over-development and bad design.
3. We need your ideas on how we can promote improvements for the town.
4. You can enjoy our social functions, lectures and trips.
5. You will receive our free magazine which comes out normally twice a year.
6. You choose just how much you do for us.

If you wish to join, please complete the form below.

BECOME A MEMBER - JOIN NOW

If you care about Ludlow and its surroundings please complete the application form (or a copy) below and send it in now.

To: The Membership Secretary, Ludlow Civic Society, The Readers House, Church Walk, Ludlow SY8 1AI

Please accept my/our application to join the society.

Annual membership subscription is £13 per person - normally due on September 1st. I enclose £..... to cover.

Cheques payable to 'Ludlow Civic Society' please.

Please treat all my subscriptions and/or donations to the Ludlow Civic Society until further notice as GIFT AID.
I am currently a UK taxpayer.

Signed:..... Date:.....

Name (Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms)

Address

.....

.....

Postcode Email