

Ludlow Heritage News

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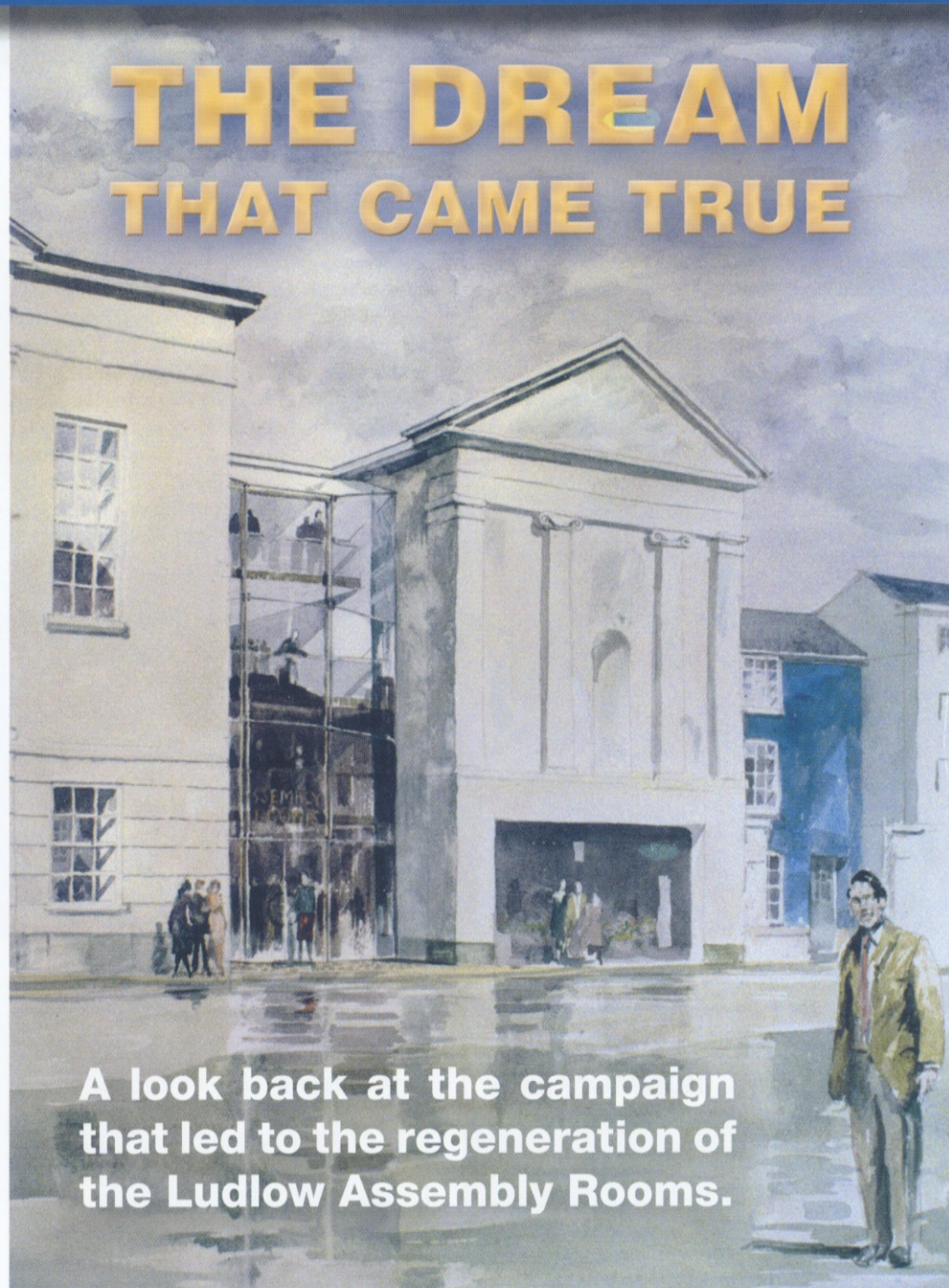
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FREE

It is twenty years since the remodelled Ludlow Assembly Rooms opened as an arts and community centre for Ludlow and the surrounding district. Here we look back at the events which led up to the opening of the centre on May 31st 1993. The mid 1980s in Ludlow had seen the demolition of two important buildings in the heart of Ludlow, the Victorian town hall (1986), a venue for local entertainments, and the Clifton Cinema in Old Street (1987), then being used as a bingo hall (Figs. 1 & 2). This left a major gap in the town's social life, and many in Ludlow looked for ways to replace these amenities. The project to rejuvenate the Assembly Rooms had begun.

The impulse came from two main sources. The first was led by OSCA, Old Street Cinema Action, which campaigned for the Clifton Cinema to be turned into an arts and community venue after the owners of the Essoldo Bingo Club had decided to put the building up for sale. It was initially hoped that the South Shropshire District Council would buy the old cinema for community use. OSCA was well known for its pro-active campaigning in the form of fund-raising events, petitions and even public marches through Ludlow town centre (Fig. 3). In the end South Shropshire District Council did not buy the building but the OSCA campaign vigorously carried on. After the demolition of the cinema in 1987, the group turned their attention to finding alternative facilities for community events, including renting the old Museum room in Mill Street. They continued to run a wide range of fund-raising events which kept the idea of leisure provision at the forefront of people's minds. The second source was the Town Council elected in 1987 which included many new councillors, several of whom had campaigned on the issue of leisure provision.

It became clear to both groups that the town's run-down Assembly Rooms had the potential to be turned into a multi-purpose arts and community venue. The Assembly Rooms were now in the ownership of the Shropshire County Council. The next step was the formation of the Ludlow and District Community Association. In September 1988 they took a short-term lease on the first floor of the old Museum in Mill Street. Much discussion took place between the LDCA and all three councils



and an agenda for development was set out. A referendum in the autumn of 1988 about the future use of the Assembly Rooms took place with over 66% of the town supporting a community use of the rooms. This started in 1989 with the Town Council taking a lease out on those parts of the rooms which had been occupied by the Starline Club. The project gained momentum by the formation of a joint LDCA/Ludlow Town Council

Development Committee led by Rick Alexander. In November of the same year the rooms were given a mainly voluntary-led £12,000 makeover. The year ended with a lavish New Year's Ball.

In June 1990 the Town Council by a large majority voted to enhance the Assembly Rooms. In July 1990 architects Roscoe and Bean were appointed with their proposal for a modern link building joining the Assembly



Figs. 1 & 2: Clifton Cinema – exterior and interior views

Fig. 3 (below): The OSCA banner in front of the Butter Cross

rooms with the old Museum building. By the October of 1990 fund-raising had begun in earnest with a door-to-door appeal in the town which gained wide support. Grants were promised from a number of sources including the Shropshire County Council's Village Hall Committee and the South Shropshire Council's Sports and Arts Foundation. By the autumn of 1992 the funds had reached £412,000. The fund-raising committee was praised by the Civic Trust for running a 'model campaign'. In October of 1992 the building contract was awarded to Frank Galliers Ltd. of Shrewsbury with work beginning that same month with a predicted completion date of April 1993. The new Assembly Rooms would comprise the Tourist Information Centre and Museum on the ground floor with the upper floors offering space for a wide range of activities including a large auditorium, exhibition rooms, conference facilities, meetings area and catering and bar facilities.

By the early spring of 1993, things had moved on apace. The auditorium seats had been individually sponsored by members of the public and by businesses and organisations in the town, including the Civic Society. Jenny Smallman, the Mayor that year, had dedicated her fund-

raising appeal to renovation of cinema seats rescued from a theatre in Bath for the auditorium balcony. The decision was taken to split the management of the venue into two areas, with Bob Rose in charge of the building and Cindy Watson in charge of the centre's programming. With a small team behind them, including Christine as secretary, Ian Buchanan as projectionist, and catering managers Wendy Berry and Cath Hiron, all was set ready for the grand opening at the end of May.

The new Ludlow Assembly Rooms opened on the Spring Bank Holiday Monday with a carnival atmosphere – it happened to coincide with the annual Town Carnival. The opening night film presentation was the Merchant Ivory production of E.M. Forster's *Howard's End*. It had many scenes filmed locally and included many people who had been involved with the Assembly Rooms project as extras. The packed first programme set the tone for the programming at the venue for the next twenty years. In the first week *Howard's End* was shown in conjunction with Disney's *The Jungle Book*. The week ended with the venue's first live show starring the well-known cabaret duo Kit and the Widow performing to a packed house. The second



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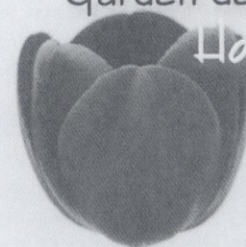


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week saw the first appearance of the Ludlow Amateur Dramatic Society who presented a highly-praised production of Enid Bagnold's *The Chalk Garden*. The later part of June saw the first of the venue's art house films with two packed showings of the Australian film *Strictly Ballroom*. June ended with an appearance by the Bessa Band who quickly got the audience up on their feet dancing. At the end of June the Ludlow Festival moved in with a popular programme of



dance, lectures and music theatre. In the main, the townspeople were very receptive to the newly regenerated rooms. The *Ludlow Journal* claimed, 'The return of weekly cinema to Ludlow has proved to be an enormous success. *Howard's End* was sold out every night and subsequent films have continued to attract large audiences and new cinema-goers of all ages.' The stage had been set for further future development and innovation at the venue.



LUDLOW ASSEMBLY ROOMS ENHANCEMENT OCTOBER 1992 - MAY 1993

Top left to right:

- Passageway from Mill Street – site of the future link building, 3rd October 1992
- New foundations created for the link building, 28th November 1992
- Goodbye to the old Starline Club lighting rig, 3rd October 1992

Bottom left to right:

- Lowering and positioning of the link building staircase, 26th January 1993
- The new auditorium on opening day, 31st May 1993



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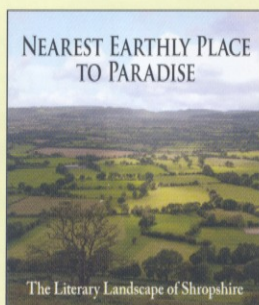
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THE DEATH-WATCH BEETLE

Michel Chinery investigates...



Image: GillesSM

We hear a great deal about re-cycling these days, and rightly so, but it is not really new: worms, fungi, beetles and various other organisms have been at it for millions of years, eating and decomposing dead plant and animal matter and returning its constituents to the soil where it is re-absorbed by plant roots to re-start the cycle. If these decomposers were to disappear we would very soon be buried under a thick layer of dead leaves and twigs and other debris.

Beetles play a major part in breaking down dead wood, and this is obviously of great importance in the forests, but building timbers are no different in their eyes from dead trees in the forest, and several species have become serious pests over the centuries. The legendary death-watch beetle is undoubtedly the most notorious of our timber pests, although less common than its smaller cousin the woodworm or furniture beetle. It attacks a wide range of hard woods in the wild, but in buildings it is nearly always associated with oak timbers, and thus found mainly in older buildings.

The adult death-watch beetle is chestnut brown with scattered patches of pale hairs

and is 7-10 mm long. The females lay their eggs in the timber, and the grubs that hatch from the eggs use their tough jaws to tunnel through it. Wood is not a very nutritious material, however, and the creamy white grubs grow very slowly; they may spend up to 14 years chewing their way through the timber before they are fully grown, but even then they need help to digest their monotonous diet. They can survive only if the wood has already been partly digested by fungi so, because fungi need a certain amount of moisture, the beetles can flourish only where the timber is slightly damp. Roof timbers and external beams are thus particularly at risk.

When the larvae are fully grown, with a length of about 9 mm, they turn into pupae, and new adult beetles usually appear in the spring. The adults make regular ticking sounds by tapping their heads against the walls of their tunnels, and this is believed to be a way of finding each other for mating. Amplified by the hollow tunnels, the sounds can be quite loud, but we hear them mainly in the quiet of the night. In the past the ticking was probably heard quite

commonly by people sitting with sick and dying relatives, and this is how the beetle got its name.

After mating, many of the female beetles simply lay their eggs in the existing tunnels, so the infestation can go on for many years, or even centuries, until the conditions become unsuitable or the food supply runs out. Some of the beetles chew neat, circular exit holes about 3mm in diameter, and this is often the first indication of an infestation. Some of the females fly off to lay their eggs in other timbers, but they rarely travel far and infestations tend to be very localised.

Beetle infestations have long been treated with insecticidal sprays and paints, but these do not penetrate very far and beetles living deep in the timber are unaffected. Modern technology has now come into play, and it is possible to use ultra-sound to detect damage deep in the timbers. Insecticides can then be injected into the right places, but this is not worth doing if, as often happens, the infestation has already died out. Fresh, brightly-coloured dust and clean flight holes will indicate if an infestation is still alive.



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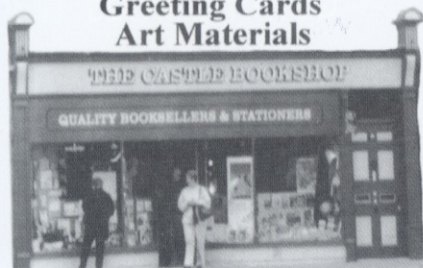
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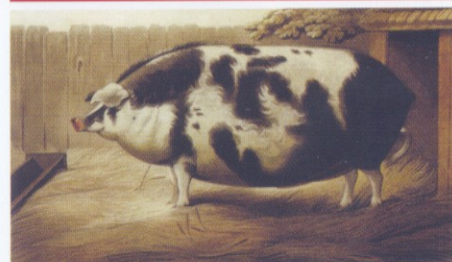
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LUDLOW'S GERMAN TROPHY CANNON

Roger Bartlett and Roy Payne

Ludlow's Russian cannon is a familiar sight, standing in Castle Walk, outside the Castle gates. It has stood there since 1858, shortly after it arrived in the town as a trophy from the Crimean War (see *Ludlow Heritage News*, No. 56, Summer 2012, pp.3-5). Much less well-known – or remembered – is the fact that Ludlow had a second trophy cannon: a German field gun presented to the town after World War I, which also stood in Castle Walk, from 1919 to 1940.

Available information on Ludlow's German trophy gun, drawn from the Borough Council records and local newspapers, is sparse. After the end of the war, a national War Trophies Committee was set up to distribute captured German *matériel* as trophies across the country. In December 1918 Ludlow Borough Council considered an offer from the War Office to loan the town a captured German gun or guns, but the Council felt that this should be a gift, as the gun in question had been captured by a county regiment. The *Church Stretton Advertiser* reported on 23 January



1919 that the Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire, the Earl of Powis, was proposing the permanent gift of a war trophy for Ludlow. On 6 February 1919 the Mayor reported that he had accepted an offer from the War Trophies Committee of 'the following captured enemy stores: – 1 German machine gun (damaged); 1 German machine gun ammunition box; 1 German machine gun ammunition belt'. But these items do not reappear in any Council minutes, and it is unclear whether they ever reached the town.

The first indication of the presence of a large German trophy comes on 7 August 1919: the Council Finance Committee's report included a minute that 'The housing of the German Gun presented to Ludlow was left to His Worship the Mayor, the Town Clerk and the Deputy Surveyor to arrange.' The field gun was placed in Castle Walk, further round from the Russian cannon, approximately opposite the Blue Boar yard. No further reference has been found until

1925, when the Council's Markets and Fairs Committee stated in its report that it had 'authorised the Surveyor to fence the German Cannon in Castle Walk'. This gave rise to an outburst of anti-German sentiment among some Councillors. The *Ludlow Advertiser's*

The German gun in Castle Gardens, Dinham, 1936. Michael Faraday and his cousin, Ted Payne. Photograph courtesy of Michael Faraday.

account of the 7 August Council meeting noted that when adoption of the Market and Fairs report was moved and seconded, Councillor Bastick said (to laughter), 'I think it is against English principles to protect anything German. To my mind it is time we did with our cannon what another local authority did with theirs – sell it for scrap.' He was supported by Councillor Hardwick, who thought the gun was a monstrosity which should be thrown on the Council tip, and by Councillor Langley who felt the demand to pay for fencing 'a gun like that' was an insult. But Councillor Poyner retorted that he would rather see a gun in the town 'which our boys captured in France'; while Councillor Palmer claimed it as a sign of British victory. Alderman Bodenham explained that the fencing would only cost a few shillings, and was necessary because children played with the gun's shutter and made a noise with it, which annoyed local residents. Alderman Sheldon was not convinced: he 'could not imagine any man having respect for a German gun – cast it away!' But the report was adopted.

In the Second World War, many trophy guns of all sorts fell victim to the government's drive to collect scrap metal. As the national demand for metal for the war effort increased, in 1940 the call went out to collect up non-essential metal objects – in particular, iron railings were taken from streets and gardens, and local authorities also focused on municipal ordnance. Large numbers of trophy guns were carted away. The Crimean trophies of Bath, Bridgnorth, Cheltenham, Derby, Glasgow, Lichfield, Portsmouth, Wootton Bassett, Wrexham, to name just a few, were apparently lost in this way, and it seems likely that the same fate befell the prize Crimean cannon at Hereford and Leominster. In the event, much of the metal collected was not put to war use. Ludlow also answered the call to contribute scrap to the national salvage



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effort, but it chose to dispose of its German, not its Russian, gun. When the appeal came to collect scrap metal, the Council's General Purposes Committee responded actively. It dispensed with 'the old weighbridge at Smithfield' and sent redundant sheep-pens to the good cause. The GPC also resolved that the German gun should be scrapped.

The councillors were less happy about the ornamental iron around the town. They had a long discussion about sending off the chains which fenced the Castle Gardens, eventually deciding against it, and they showed persistent hostility to the Ministry of Supply's demand for railings. Councillors complained that railings had been left in place at a race-course elsewhere while Ludlow's were confiscated, and that many small railings in front of private houses were not worth the taking – the removal of these small items would cause inconvenience to the people in the houses, declared Alderman Poyner a year later in 1941, and probably cost more to remove than they were worth. There were thousands of tons of old iron which could be utilised without touching these railings, he observed: 'for instance, the old cannon which was removed from the Castle grounds about 12 months ago, [is] still in the town.' The field gun, it appears, had not been taken away promptly; but it evidently did not survive the war.

Ludlow's salvage campaign – covering a range of materials, not only metal – went on to great success: at the end of the first year of collecting, Councillor Fred Reeves could make the claim that 'they had done better than any other town in Shropshire.' Throughout, there is no mention of the Russian gun: the sacrifice of the German field-gun evidently enabled the survival of Ludlow's Crimean cannon. But after more than twenty years in Castle Walk, the town's World War I trophy was destroyed to help the war effort of World War II.

BOOK REVIEW

DEEDS OF THE PALMERS' GILD OF LUDLOW

Edited by M.A. Faraday, MA, FSA

Ludlow was a flourishing town in the Middle Ages, making the fortunes of many of its citizens at first from the wool trade and later from the woollen cloth trade. Ludlow Castle was also the centre of increasingly important lordships, first that of the Lacys, and later of the Mortimers, earls of March, becoming one of the main bases of the House of York, and eventually of the Council in the Marches of Wales. In the 13th century its leading burgesses founded the Palmers' Gild which became the leading institution in the town until its dissolution in 1551, supporting an important chantry in the parish church and a college of chaplains who provided many services, both spiritual and secular, in the town, financing building and ornamentation work in the church and providing a kind of mutual insurance service for its members who came from all over the country, including at one time Richard, duke of York himself. At Pentecost it also held an elaborate annual feast for its members.

The college of chaplains was financed from rental income derived from rent-charges and from the Gild's large number of properties within the town and in some of the parishes outside; these rent-charges and properties had been acquired over the space of 300 years from donations, bequests and purchase. The Gild rented them out; at first, leases for lives were usual, but later, leases for terms of years became more typical. The Gild's archives include the title-deeds for these rent-charges and properties, often demonstrating the owner's own title, so a

pre-Gild history can be described for many of them. The Gild came into existence in the late 1250s, but some of the deeds in the archive date from the very early 13th century. Leases subsisting at the time of the Gild's dissolution in 1551 and the surrender of its properties to the Corporation of Ludlow were often kept after their expiry.

This edition of English abstracts of some 1,495 deeds of various kinds, mostly in Latin, some in Norman-French or English, demonstrate the extent of the Gild's interests, but also provide the most important extant source of information about the families of the town and other places, their descents, the derivation of their names and their occupations. The witness-lists to the deeds evidence the holding of offices and show the order of precedence, even of kinship-groups, of these persons at different times. The edition is fully indexed with extensive cross-referencing of variant spellings of names. The collection contains roughly 13,500 references to named individuals living in and around Ludlow, with some in Leominster, Marlborough and other places.

Deeds of the Palmers' Gild of Ludlow
(xxxvi + 329 pp., 2012)

This book may be purchased from the Lulu GB website for £24 (hardback) plus postage, or £16 (paperback) plus postage. Purchasers in the UK may buy directly from M.A. Faraday for £34 (hardback) or £24 (paperback) including postage – these prices apply until Royal Mail tariffs increase (probably in April 2013). E-mail: f2594255@gmail.com, payment by cheque to M.A. Faraday, 47 York Gardens, Walton-on-Thames, Surrey, KT12 3EW. If a purchaser wishes to buy from the editor for delivery at the same time copies of *The Hereford Chantry Valuations of 1547* and/or *The Hereford Musters of 1539 and 1542*, some savings on postage can be achieved.

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OBITUARY



DICK STEPHENS

Richard George Stanton Stephens, always known as Dick, was born on 21st February 1914 at 'Clifton Villas', Temeside, Ludlow. He always reminded people that this was just before the outbreak of World War I. His mother was a local girl, Amy Cooper, and his father, William Stanton Stephens, came from a long line of shop-keepers from Kington in Herefordshire. He was educated at Ludlow Grammar School, and he often spoke fondly of his time there. He also often talked about going on pioneering school trips to France in the 1920s. After leaving school, he went into the family grocery business, W.S. Stephens, located in Upper Galdeford.

He spent the war in the Ayrshire Yeomanry, fighting in both North Africa and Italy. After the war he returned to Ludlow with his first wife, Joan Wray, and they lived in Mill Street with their young daughter, Linda. After the death of his father in 1954, he, along with his brother, Meyrick, and his sister, Betty, began to expand the family business. They opened one of the town's first delicatessen shops in the

High Street in 1957. In 1960 he bought No.3 Castle Street and developed one of the town's first self-service grocery stores. A cash-and-carry extension was opened at the rear of the Castle Street premises in 1966. In later years the business was rationalised, with all the outlets moving to a single site in Castle Street. Dick went on working in the family business until his retirement in 1987.

Dick had a wide range of interests including antiques, gardening and foreign travel. He built up a large collection of furniture, glass and paintings. He particularly loved simple country objects produced between 1720 and 1820. At 7 Dinham, the house he moved to with his second wife, Pat, in 1966, he created a lovely wild garden full of unusual plants. The garden was regularly opened for the public. Dick had a great love of European travel and had a deep affection for Aix-en-Provence and for Seville in Spain.

He was involved with many Ludlow institutions including, among others, the Old Ludlovians' Association, the Friends of Ludlow Museum and the Ludlow Civic Society. He joined the Committee of the Ludlow Society, as it was then, a year after its founding, in 1955 and served for nearly forty years, bringing to committee meetings a valuable continuity and the benefit of his deep knowledge of Ludlow. When he retired from the Committee in 1995, he was made a Vice-President of the Society.

Dick died in his 99th year after a short illness in Ludlow Hospital on October 22nd 2012.

Stanton Stephens

NOTES from the chairman

We are in the middle of another successful season of the Civic Society Lecture Series. Penny Wake is already seeking speakers and interesting topics for the 2013/14 season. Any subjects you think we should cover would be most welcome – please let us know.

The Committee is starting some new initiatives for greater involvement of members and non-members to improve awareness of the buildings in the town for town residents and visitors. The national register of 'Blue Plaques' and the listing of blue plaques on our website is an example. We are looking at ways to use these and other initiatives to help in this campaign.

Together with Shropshire Council and Ludlow Town Council, we are investigating what we call 'Buildings at Issue', where certain properties are left in a dilapidated – and in some cases dangerous – condition. This has to be a matter of 'persuasion' with errant freeholders, so success is somewhat limited. This is a long term project.

The design for the Ludlow Jubilee Garden has been prepared by Nicki Lewis-Smith, and we are in the process of obtaining quotations for the preparation of the ground and the laying out of the hard landscaping and the provision of the plants and bushes. St. Laurence's Church is applying for the Faculty approval to enable the wall to be breached and a new doorway to be created, and we will be seeking quotations for carrying out the subsequent necessary work.

We are also seeking approval a change of use to a 'community garden'. Grant aid will be sought for this next phase of work once the quotations are to hand. Anyone interested in being involved in this phase of the project should contact John Nash or me.

Approval has been given for the provision of a small almshouse development on the south end of the site adjoining the garden land, and building work is likely to begin shortly.

The Civic Society continues to carry out its duties for the members and Ludlow itself. It is dependent on the Committee who give freely of their time, so please look at our website occasionally to see who is on the Committee. If you would like to recommend anyone you think may be of benefit to Ludlow to serve on the Civic Society Committee, please let me know.

Dan Lloyd

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EVENTS

The Christmas Party held as usual in the Palmers' Hall, offered the added attraction of musical entertainment provided by Steve Dunachie, who also accompanied local vocalist and writer Peter Burden. With a bit of luck we shall be able to repeat the musical theme next Christmas as it definitely gave an extra dimension to the evening which was fun. Do come next year!

A visit to the Birmingham Gun Barrel Proof House will be taking place just after Heritage News goes to press. The Proof House, still doing business in its original premises, was established in 1813, is still proofing guns, and is an intriguing window on the gun trade and part of what made Birmingham so important during the industrial revolution and beyond. There is already a list forming of those wishing to come on a repeat visit next autumn.

Next season's programme of lectures is being finalised and will cover wide-ranging topics from the delights of chateaux and gardens of Normandy, and Lucien Bonaparte's time in Ludlow to the story of a coffin furnishing manufacturer in Birmingham and some of the great and good of Tudor England.

Penny Wake

MEMBERSHIP

Each year the four or five months between October and February often prove the most interesting for the Membership Secretary. The avalanche of renewed subscriptions settles, and more attention can be given to individually thanking members for their donations over and above their subscriptions. The Committee's thanks go to all who have generously given over the whole year.

Many new members have joined this past eight months, and I have enjoyed welcoming you individually when the opportunity arises, with particular emphasis on the newcomers to the town. We are also cheered to welcome back members whose memberships have temporarily lapsed.

However, the most rewarding feedback has come from the distribution of the Heritage News magazine which is sent far and wide, and produces much interest and some correspondence, especially for those who no longer live in Ludlow or who cannot get to the monthly talks.

The Committee hopes to increase the membership further by more publicity and invitations to join up in the Spring.

Jane Hunt



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

The Editor, Heritage News,
5 Castle Street, Ludlow SY8 1AS

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- 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, 51 Julian Road, Ludlow SY8 1HD

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.

SignedDate

Name (Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms)

Address

PostcodeEmail