

Ludlow *Heritage*



Published twice a year by
Ludlow Civic Society
www.ludlowcivicsociety.org

No 65 Autumn/winter 2016

N E W S

FREE

Summer
Regattas

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Ludlow Floods

Programme
and Events

At the confluence of the Corve and Teme *(part one)*

Edwardian summer regattas

Derek Beattie

As today, Ludlow's economy at the turn of the twentieth century relied partly on an influx of visitors, especially during the summer months. One area that had not yet been fully exploited as a tourist attraction was the River Teme. It had long been a centre of leisure activity for the people of the town, acting not only as a playground, especially for the younger working classes, but also as the venue for middle class swimming and boating clubs. However, in the Edwardian years Ludlow decided to host annual regattas, hoping to attract hundreds of extra visitors. Their genesis lay with a decision of

the Town's Attractions Committee in 1905 to borrow money from the Council to purchase three boats – two double sculls and one single scull – to be hired by the hour for pleasure. With an initial launching platform near Mill Street Weir, the scheme was an instant hit with both locals and visitors, with queues forming to spend time on the water. The idea was so popular with visitors that the Committee, against all past precedents, even turned a deaf ear to protestations from the pulpit of St Laurence's and voted to extend the scheme to Sundays.

When the first regatta was held on the lower waters of the Teme, between the Mill Street weir and Dinham Bridge, the most popular side to view it from was that of the Whitcliffe bank. As it was common land no entry fee could be charged and this resulted in the next two regattas being moved upstream in an attempt to increase income.



Continued overleaf



To build on this success the Committee very soon decided to hold a regatta on Thursday (half day closing) 31st August 1905 and purchased another single scull boat so that races could be held. The course was upstream from the Mill Street Weir to Dinham Bridge, and generous cash prizes were offered to tempt entrants. Several hundred spectators watched from both banks with the majority on the Whitcliffe side and here lay the difficulty. As it was common land these spectators could not be charged and this led to a loss of income. Because of this it was decided that the following regatta would be moved upstream beyond Dinham Bridge where private land encompassed both banks and spectators would find it far more difficult to avoid paying an entrance fee.

Thanks to Alderman Lloyd, the chairman of the Attractions Committee, land that he owned, the Linney Meadows, was offered for use by the organisers. Sadly, with spectators limited to just this section of one side of the water, the 600-700 people who had paid could not see the entire course due to a bend in the river. Obviously this rather spoilt their enjoyment. On the plus side, thanks to being combined with the annual races held by the Swimming club, the regatta had been enlarged. To make the afternoon's entertainment even more enjoyable, ladies' and mixed rowing races were now included, and a water polo match between Ludlow and Craven Arms could also be watched. Novelty competitions were also introduced such as an obstacle race, a barrel race and the often hilarious spectacle of men trying to clamber along a greasy pole protruding over the waters. In addition, afternoon tea was served in a large marquee to the sound of the Town Band.

The whole event was turning into a diluted form of Henley, watered down further with more than a dash of the funfair to keep all classes entertained.

Learning from their mistake, the organisers in 1907 moved the spectators across the river to Swan's Nest Meadows from where the entire course could be viewed. These fields were entered via the drive through Oakley Park. As for the day's entertainment, this was expanded once again with the introduction of athletic events, but, financially, matters did not improve. With an entrance fee compulsory for all now allied to a circuitous route to view the event, spectator numbers fell yet again. The fall was so worrying that a decision was taken to return the 1908 regatta to the original lower waters below Dinham Bridge.

The problem of spectators watching the events from the Whitcliffe without having to pay an entrance fee now raised its head again, but it was hoped that they could be encouraged to make a voluntary contribution. To aid this 'a bevy of young ladies' would mingle amongst the crowd, selling programmes and cajoling donations. As regards spectator numbers, the return to the original venue was a great success, with 'a goodly number of people from the adjoining country districts' attending along with many from Birmingham who travelled to Ludlow by rail. The entertainment even extended into the evening with the Town Band playing on to allow dancing to proceed until dusk. The only drawback, noted by the local newspaper this year was that the sheer number of spectators attending, allied to a lack of public conveniences, 'caused unpleasantness to the public'.

It would have been thought that with this success an annual regatta was

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here to stay, but the success was only in terms of spectator numbers not in financial terms. A loss again had to be borne due to a disappointing voluntary collection from the crowds lining the Whitcliffe bank. Sadly, just two more regattas were to be held. In 1909 and 1910, in addition to the problem of raising money from the spectators viewing from the Whitcliffe side, poor weather blighted both. Drizzle and cloud kept many away in 1909 whilst, though the day chosen for 1910 was dry, the continuous rain that preceded it ensured that the ground on both sides was muddy and especially treacherous underfoot on the steep-sided yet popular Whitcliffe bank. The overall result was two years of sparse attendance.



Though boat racing was the mainstay of the regattas, the most popular part of the afternoons for the spectators was reported to have been the novelty events such as the barrel races photographed here. These offered the prospect of duckings amid much laughter.

At a meeting of the Attractions Committee in 1911 a decision was taken not to hold a regatta that year or in the coming years. The financial losses of the three previous years were now revealed to the public, together with the conclusion that the cumulative effect could no longer be borne. The short and glamorous interlude of riverside entertainment for all offered by the annual regattas had come to an early end after just six years. However, the River Teme, for many years to come, still continued to serve as a playground for the people of Ludlow, not only for organisations such as swimming and boating clubs, but as a place for all to pursue leisure activities and play.



Water polo was added to the programme in 1906 with a match between Ludlow and Craven Arms. Which team sported the caps is not known, but it appears that the event was popular with the spectators and especially with the young ladies.



This view of spectators taking advantage of the Whitcliffe bank to use it as a natural grandstand helps to explain why the crowds failed to turn up in 1909 and 1910 when rain turned the ground into slippery mud. The picture perhaps also helps illuminate the embarrassment that must have been caused due to the lack of public conveniences.



Class and social position were important in Edwardian Ludlow. Here, in the seated section, with the band playing behind them, can be seen some of the social elite of the town with their wives and daughters displaying the latest fashion in hats. Knowing their places, their social inferiors stand in the roped-off section to the side.

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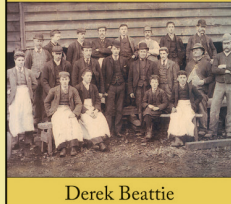
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The history of flooding in Ludlow

Steve Heavens
Michael Rosenbaum

June 1924: Lower Corve Street

Do you know the origin of the name 'the Bread Walk'? On 6th May 1886 according to the Shropshire Magazine for July 1911, 'at an early hour somebody was going from door to door rousing the inhabitants with the report that the River Teme was rising alarmingly fast. Some ground floor rooms were flooded to a depth of five feet. In Holgate Fee [near the bottom of Old Street] water was by now 8-10 feet deep and egress from any of the cottages in the area was out of the question; the only thing to do was to construct a raft to go to them.

'This was at the end of a wild period of rain and snow, and more rain to follow. The rain kept falling. Up and up the Whitecliff it rose to an unprecedented height, almost to the top of the hill. The railway bridge spanning the Corve [at Onibury] fell with a crash at 6.30 a.m., dead cattle and sheep floated everywhere, and many a small farmer was utterly ruined.

'Of course the flood swept away the lovely walk alongside the Teme, and it was essential to rebuild it. Lord Clive paid the workmen who were glad of the work of remaking the famous walk, in bread and blankets and food. They named it amongst themselves 'The Bread and Blanket Walk'; time has shortened it to 'the Bread Walk'.

In June 1924 the Corve broke its banks and flooded Lower Corve Street. Photographs show very high water levels for both the Teme and the Corve. Photographic evidence shows that Lower Corve Street was flooded 0.5 metres higher, and that the level of the Teme at Ludford Bridge was around 1 metre higher, than in the recent floods of 2007. And this was apparently 'not one of the worst years'.

Following the very heavy winter snowfalls of January and February 1947, one of the severest since the 'Great Flood' of Tuesday February 10th 1795 was in March of that year, documented dramatically on home cine film.

In October 1987 the fields off Linney and the recreation ground were flooded by water from

the Corve. Historian David Lloyd's photograph collection shows a flood zone around the Corve similar to the flood of 2007 some twenty years later. It occurred at the same time as the 'great storm' of October 1987 which devastated southern England. That storm was described by weathermen at the time as a freak '1 in 200 year event' on the grounds that no such storm had occurred since the 'great storm' of 1703. Yet just two years later, on 'Burns night', January 1990 there was an even more severe storm! On 30th April 2012 heavy rain again led to flooding of the Corve, the haunches of the footbridge along the Shropshire Way being inundated. Such flooding is now recurring almost annually, and the Corve is progressively changing its course

The Summer 2007 floods and the influence of weather.

On 25th June 2007 flooding of the Corve swept away the 1931 road bridge, carrying off parts of Coronation Avenue as well as a nearby house. On 20th July of the same year there was a second flood, this time primarily of the Teme. Both events caused severe flooding of Lower Corve Street and along Temeside. Fields and properties on Linney were also affected, floodwater reaching the roadway at one point.



River Corve from Burway Bridge, February 2016

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2007: collapse of Burway Bridge, and Coronation Avenue



Temeside July 2007

A hydraulic study by the National Environmental Research Council showed that the flooding of Summer 2007 was associated with unusually high summer rainfall over a period of three months. Over the historical period 1766 to 2007 the three-month rainfall figures between April and September exceeded 400mm during the years 1776, 1782, 1800, 1830, 1880, 1912, 1927 and 2007. So the weather conditions that were responsible for the 2007 floods had occurred eight times in the previous 240 years. Heavy rainfall over a three-month period is not the sole determinant of whether or not flooding will occur, but it is one of the main preconditions for increased flood risk.

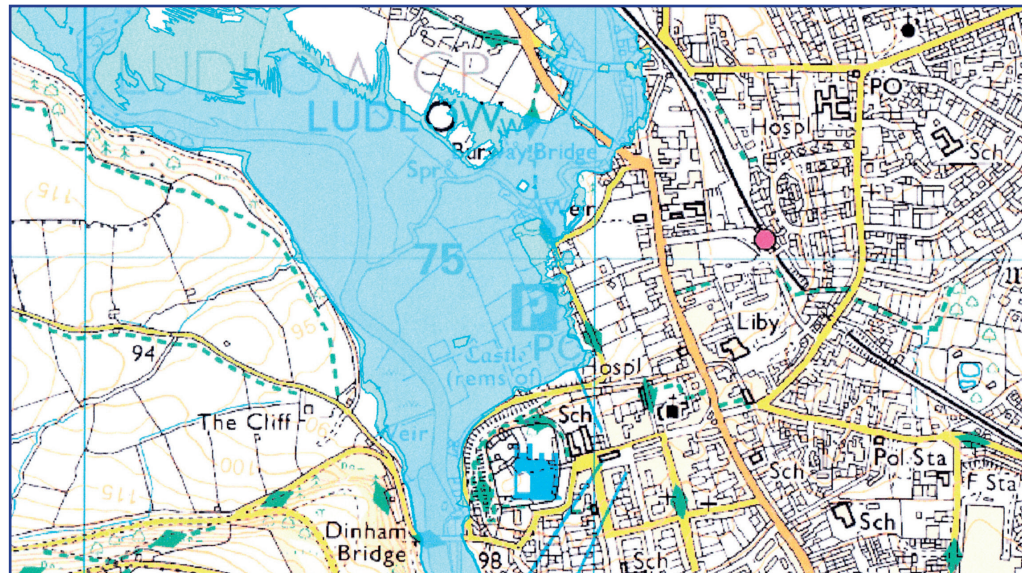
Slightly lower rainfall figures, in the range of 300-400 mm, have occurred 22 times in the past 240 years, including the years 1919, 1924, 1946, 1950, 1956, 1957 and 1960. The Corve is known to have flooded in 1924, 1927, 1946 and 2007, and there have been many other incidents. Every recorded instance of flooding from the Corve can be associated with a period of heavy summer rainfall. The year 2007 was exceptional only in the recent context. Because no heavy summer rainfall was experienced in England and Wales during the period 1960-2006, the scarcity of flood incidents over that period has resulted in a certain amount of complacency concerning flood risk.

The geography of the flood plain.

To see why Ludlow is so flood prone we should look at the Environment Agency's flood zone map.

Downstream of Dinham Bridge the flood zones follow the Teme closely, but why is there

such a huge flood zone at the confluence of the Teme and the Corve? At first glance it appears simply to be fluvial (river) flooding, but there is also an increased flood risk due to groundwater rising through the alluvial sediments deposited in recent times by the rivers. Groundwater rise is particularly prevalent from terraces of fluvioglacial sand and gravel around Bromfield; an example is the famous Boiling



Environment Agency flood zone map 2012

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Well. According to a DEFRA flood risk study, groundwater flooding is most likely to occur in low-lying areas underlain by aquifers (permeable rocks), which in the Ludlow area will have been caused by localised sedimentation of sands or river gravels at the bottom of valleys underlain by the much less permeable Silurian bedrock.

Susceptibility to groundwater flooding is also shown by British Geological Survey (BGS) studies. At the often-flooded Linney recreation ground, floodwaters emerge not only from both the Teme and the Corve, but also from groundwater rise since it is likewise bound by fluvioglacial terraces. The presence of both alluvium and terrace gravels is clearly marked on BGS maps, and the resulting nutrient-rich soil is well-known to gardeners in Linney. Alluvial sediment demarcates where flooding takes place and contributes hugely to flood risk, notably where the Corve drops into the floodplain of the Teme.

If any members have any other interesting photographs of the rivers, or of activities on the rivers, please let us have them for inclusion in our second edition dedicated to Ludlow and its rivers, due out in Spring 2017.

Flood risk and planning considerations

Planning authorities need constantly to be aware that where a large excess of water accumulates due to sudden precipitation events, it has to flow somewhere. The nature of a floodplain is that it can help to accommodate and absorb that excess water. Creating flood defences to channel the flow, in an attempt to 'protect' new buildings, solves nothing; it merely shifts the problem onto somebody else. One example of inadequate understanding of such natural boundaries concerned a 2009 request to change the Development Boundary to allow housing development in a field on Linney. The associated Flood Risk Assessment claimed that the flooding of June 2007 was a 1 in 200 year event. But as described above there have been at least four major flood events in Ludlow on the River Corve during the last century, and a similar number on the River Teme. There is worse to come.

Acknowledgements: Research carried out by Steve Heavens and Michael Rosenbaum. This article contains Environment Agency information © Environment Agency and database rights.



View of ice-skaters on the river Teme during the winter of 1880-81

C O M M

The onset of winter heralded by this edition is more than offset by the enlightening content and the number of contributions volunteered. Well done to the editing team. Setting a trend followed by the nation's leadership, there have been changes in the executive. We have bid farewell to our Chairman, Dan Lloyd, Treasurer, Richard Mangnall and stalwart Committee member, John Nash. Their terrific work through testing times is widely appreciated and noted. As Chairman I and the new Committee hope to build on their achievements. Some of the agenda is unfinished and evolves with circumstances; as Heraclitus observed, 'you cannot step twice into the same river'. At the August meeting the Constitution was re-visited as a 'refresher'. It was an important moment when it is all too easy to view the Society as a maintainer of the status quo, with a single mission to preserve the town.

There are four main pillars under the heading PURPOSE. While the first does, indeed, enshrine the need to secure 'the protection, conservation and, where possible, improvement to features of the town that are of historical or other public interest' the remaining three are far more wide-ranging and give ample opportunity for forward looking. Some of this will be burdensome, some joyous.

Our outgoing Chairman highlighted the ongoing battle with the less than altruistic developers proposing an out-of-town supermarket. Their claim has been supported by a series of 'professionally-assembled reports and figures' regardless of the adverse effect on the town. The originator, Mr Simon Hoare, now the M.P. for North Dorset, has a long track record as a property consultant in such ventures. This particular scheme was described as 'very much his baby' yet no proof of his paternity appears in the Planning Application. Possibly this has to do with his political connections; strangely, as when he was an Oxford Councillor he espoused 'supporting rural affairs'. As he informs his new constituents 'you will find me out and about in

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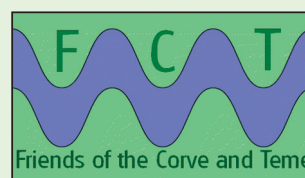
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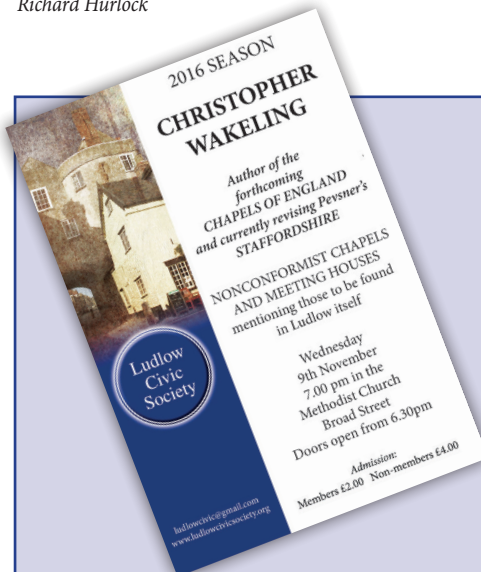
I T T E E News

North Dorset listening to, and working with local people.' He has also been appointed Vice-chairman of Rural Affairs. It is to be hoped he listens to his new locals more than he did here. Meanwhile, we continue the fight.

As to other areas, the Society continues to work with the County Planning Department, contributing local advice where it can. In view of the Government's announcement waging war on the proliferation of pointless and unsightly road signs, we are drawing up our own survey, including the disparate and often unflattering range of street lights within the Conservation Areas. The continuing work to develop contacts with other town groups involved in decisions affecting the town and its infrastructure is being expanded to form a loose 'federation' with other Shropshire Civic Societies, pooling common experience in county-based matters.

One project that has been on the back-burner for some time is the Jubilee Garden, the sloth of BT having finally been vanquished, the Almshouses are now completed after stirring work by Treasure and Son, who expect to hand over to their clients in early November. Mindful of the access problems, we have arranged a gateway suitable for future construction and maintenance which means that consolidating the boundaries can begin very soon. Considering the delays, this is a triumph. If I began with Heraclitus, I shall end with misquoting Eric Morecambe: 'I'm trying to play all the right notes, but not necessarily in the right order.'

Richard Hurlock



TALKS AND EVENTS

Once again, a big thank you to all those members who attended our varied talks and events which took place in our last season. Our autumn series of talks continues in our new venue at the Broad Street Methodist Church, with a start time of 7 pm, on Wednesday 9th November with Christopher Wakeling talking about Non-conformist chapels and meeting-houses. Once again, our Christmas Party will take place in St Laurence's Church on 14th December at 7 pm. All are welcome.

After the Christmas break we have a wide range of talks including Hugh Wood on 'Mortimer Cameos' on 11th January and John Cherry (former keeper in the Department of Medieval and Modern Europe at the British Museum) on 'Finding Gold and Silver Treasure: Looking back at Changing Societies' on 8th February. Our series of talks concludes on 8th March with a reading by local poet Gareth Owen.

Stanton Stephens

MEMBERSHIP

It seems incredible that the new Membership year has come round so quickly as I write this. It is encouraging that many new members have joined in the past twelve months. Mention should be made of the loyal folk who have remained members for many many years, some of whom now cannot get to the Talks for whatever reason. We want to thank our long-standing members who value so much the preservation of Ludlow's heritage, and, of course, reading our *Heritage Magazine*.

As well as continuing as Membership Secretary I am organising the programme of talks each month with the help of a small sub-committee whom I will take the opportunity here to thank for all their hard work. We would value feedback on the excursions and trips organised by us over the summer. Email reminders will be sent out each month before each talk.

Every year we thank those members who pay their subscriptions by Standing Order, which cuts back on the paper work, and, of course, all the completed Gift Aid forms enhance the Society's revenue. The annual subscription and entrance fee to the Talks have remained at the same level now for six years, but the increased costs of printing and postage may necessitate a small increase into 2018.

Although our change of venue for the monthly Talks has been given prior publicity, just another reminder that we meet now in the Methodist Church in Broad Street at 7 pm on those Wednesday evenings.

Jane Hunt

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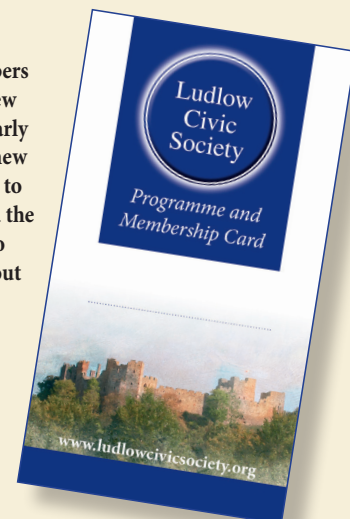
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We are part way through the membership year with new members still joining, some of whom are new residents in Ludlow. We particularly extend a warm welcome to these new members who have recently come to live in Ludlow. We hope they find the Civic Society an interesting way to meet fellow citizens and learn about Ludlow's heritage.

Some changes are afoot. Many members use email so we propose to publicise our evening talks each month by email as well as items of additional news. Members should not forget that our website, www.ludlowcivicsociety.org also gives you much information. You will also read here in the magazine that the Committee is arranging various outings to local places of interest, which are in addition to the evening talks. We hope these will prove popular.

Please note that the talks continue to start at 7 p.m.

Jane Hunt

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