

Ludlow Heritage News

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A 1950s photograph of the original Administration building of the Ludlow workhouse, now part of the Ludlow Community Hospital.

BUILDING THE LUDLOW UNION WORKHOUSE

This account is based on the study of the history of Ludlow Poor Law Union 1836 - 1929 by members of the Ludlow Historical Research Group.

A traveller approaching Ludlow from Bridgnorth or Cleobury Mortimer in the spring of 1837 would have seen, near the Sandspit Turnpike gate at Gravel Hill, the first signs of what would become, over the next three years, one of the biggest buildings to be built in the Ludlow area since the Middle Ages. The decision to build a new workhouse at Gravel Hill was taken by the Board of Guardians of the Ludlow Union, established in 1836 to administer the poor law in Ludlow and District following the great poor law reform of 1834.

At first, progress on the project was orderly and, by modern standards, remarkably quick. The decision in principle to build a new workhouse was taken by the Board of Guardians on 11th. August 1836. A suitable site was found and acquired from the Town Council a month later, and on 17th. October tenders were invited for the design of a workhouse to accommodate up to 250 paupers "to be constructed so that it could be extended for greater numbers and with the intention to heat it with hot water". In November Matthew Stead, a young Ludlow architect, was awarded the contract to design the workhouse, with the curious proviso that his father - also Matthew Stead - would agree to superintend its construction.

The plans that accompanied Stead's successful tender are still held in Shrewsbury Record Office, and have been used to produce the

accompanying scale drawing of the building as it was originally conceived. The design conforms closely to the guidelines laid down by the Poor Law Commissioners and also to Jeremy Bentham's idea of a 'panopticon': a circular building with a control point which, Bentham thought, would be an appropriate design for any number of purposes: schools, hospitals, factories - even, he suggested, chicken coops!

Before the Guardians could invite tenders for building to Stead's plans an awkward problem arose. In submitting his design tender in November, Stead had estimated the building cost to be a little over £2,000. In January 1837 - two months later - he suddenly informed the Guardians that further calculations suggested that a more realistic figure would be £4,500 - more than double the original estimate. Instead of sacking him, which would have been a reasonable response, the Guardians instructed Stead to revise the specification to reduce the cost. Stead did this so quickly that the Board was able to invite building tenders in February, but these were still so high that Stead was again told to find "further alterations to the expensive parts of the building to reduce outlay". Eventually, a tender from a local builder - Collins of Leominster - was accepted. He undertook "to build the workhouse of stone for £3,070 complete with locks fasteners and spouting".

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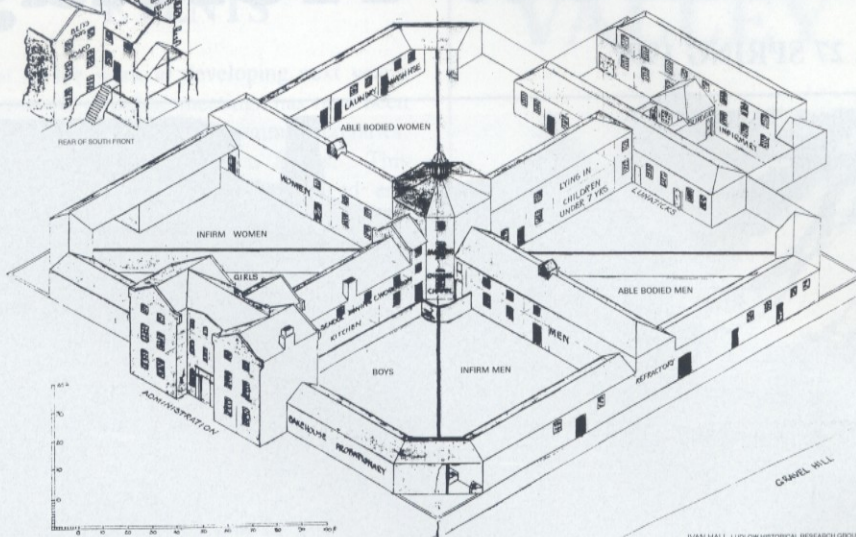
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LUDLOW UNION WORKHOUSE

DRAWN FROM PLANS SUBMITTED TO THE GUARDIANS BY MATT STEAD JUN
APPROVED BY POOR LAW COMMISSIONERS DECEMBER 1836



Ludlow Union Workhouse, drawn by Ivan Hall from plans submitted to the Guardians by Matthew Stead Junior.

Work began in March 1837: despite the costing and other problems encountered, only seven months after the decision to build a new workhouse was taken when the Guardians had not even found a suitable site. Matthew Stead Senior was engaged as Clerk of Works at a stipend of £2 a week for his part time services. But it quickly became clear that the selection of Collins as the builder had been a big mistake. He failed to recruit enough men to carry out the work expeditiously and neglected to supervise those he did appoint. He was in constant financial difficulties and so erratic in his payments of the workmen's wages that Stead Senior took over this responsibility. (In one spectacular incident, Collins snatched and ran off with £4-9-0d from the table at which Stead was paying the workmen). The response of the Board of Guardians to such unsatisfactory behaviour was irresolute. Collins was warned, fired, re-engaged and not finally dismissed until May 1838. The Guardians then took direct control of the project, continuing to use Stead senior as Clerk of Works, but by then the project was not only seriously behind schedule but greatly overspent.

These managerial difficulties were compounded by a series of technical problems and changes to the design of the building whilst the work was in progress. The best stone for building was found to lie under parts of the workhouse already constructed, so that these had to be demolished and rebuilt - adding £400 to the cost. The architect, Matthew Stead Junior, had a special interest in heating and ventilation and, after much research and a tour by Stead and a subcommittee of Guardians to other workhouses from Leominster to Taunton, the original plan - to install central heating - was dropped in favour of open fires. The subcommittee reported that in every place heated by warm air "we were assailed by a most intolerable effluvia arising from the want of an efficient mode of ventilation and obliged to

retire for fresh air before we could finish our observations, and this because of the artificial method of heating". In rejecting such methods, the Guardians concluded that aged and infirm paupers would be happier with more traditional forms of heating: "all Englishmen's feelings are strongly in favour of a cheerful and open fireplace". The consequent changes in design, including the building of chimneys, cost another £126.

Partly as a result of these and other changes - some enforced by changing circumstances but others by the capriciousness of the Guardians, for example in deciding to scrap then to reinstate the central cupola - the total, final cost of the workhouse was £6,750, including £500 for the land. This was more than double the original estimate. The building was not ready for occupation until April 1839 - nearly a year late.

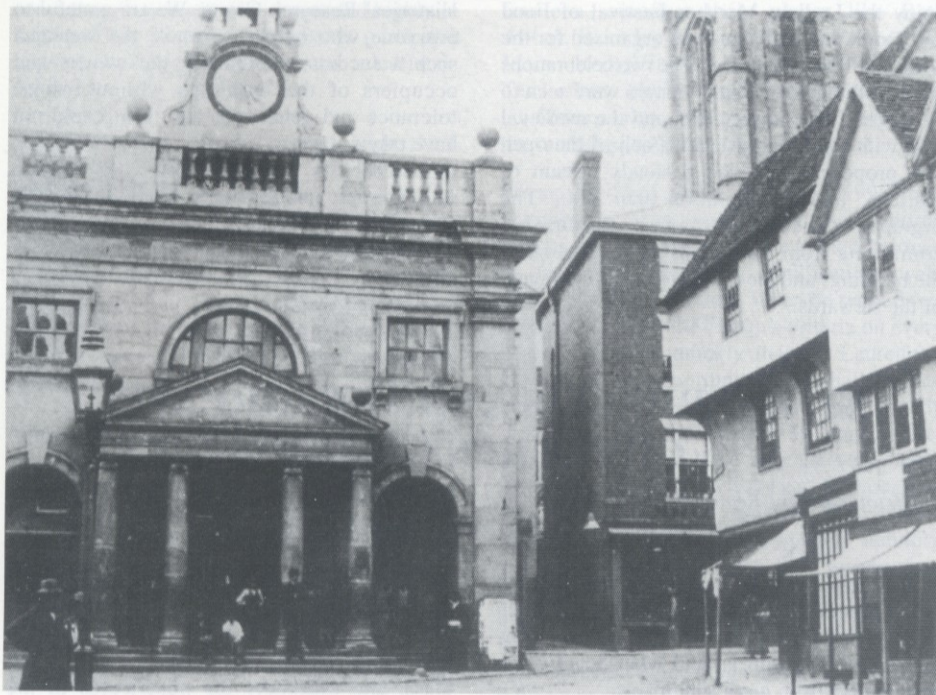
The Guardians engaged a well-known Shrewsbury architect, Edward Haycock, to enquire into and report on what had gone wrong. As is sometimes the case when one professional is asked to criticise the work of a colleague, Haycock found no fault with the Steads. In the preamble to his detailed report to the Board he reassuringly wrote "I shall, I trust, satisfy your minds that justice has been done you and that the expenditure has been fully warranted". He went on to suggest that the original tender had been £1,000 too low, and that rises in workmen's wages had added another £200 to the final bill. The technical problems that arose - particularly the need to quarry for stone from under the first foundations - could not, he felt, have been anticipated but were handled wisely when they did arise.

Perhaps encouraged by Haycock's endorsement, Matthew Stead Junior optimistically submitted an invoice of £210 for architectural services: 3.5% of £6,000. The Guardians indignantly refused to pay him more than £107-9-0d, 3.5% of the original Collins quotation!

Continued at the bottom of page 5

LUDLOW'S MEDIEVAL HERITAGE ON SHOW

Derek Williams coordinated the organisation of last year's Heritage Open Day in Ludlow



This fine photograph by Francis Bedford, taken in the 1860s, shows both 1 and 2 Broad Street with their plaster cladding. The deep jetties of No. 1, known in documents as "the corner shop", are one of many medieval features of the building.

On Saturday 14th. and Sunday 15th. September 1996 Ludlow took part, for the first time, in 'Heritage Open Days'. This is an annual event, sponsored by the Department of National Heritage, that celebrates England's rich architectural and cultural heritage by arranging free access to buildings normally closed to the public or those that usually charge an entrance fee. In the whole of England there were more than 500,000 visits to the 1700 buildings taking part in the 1996 programme.

Ludlow made a strong contribution to the weekend, opening to the public nine of its finest medieval buildings: the Guildhall, Palmers Hall and Barnaby House in Mill Street; the Rectory and the courtyard of College Court in College Street; Bodenham's; Cotswold Collections; the Shropshire Training Centre and the Bull Hotel. There were also two guided tours with medieval themes: Ron Kitchener led a tour of the River Teme and its mills, 'the powerhouse of medieval Ludlow'; David Lloyd led a walk through the main streets of the town to trace the history of the Palmers Guild.



An exterior view of the Guildhall in the 1960s. Though refronted in an imitation Gothic style in 1768, the off-centre position of the entrance is a clue that the interior is much older.

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The event proved to be popular with both local people and the hundreds of visitors in Ludlow that weekend, many of whom had come to enjoy the Ludlow Marches Festival of Food and Drink that had also been organised for the 14th. and 15th. September. The two celebrations went well together. Many visitors were seen to be tackling the sausage trail and the medieval trail with equal enthusiasm! Each of the open day properties received a steady stream of visitors, and some more than 400. The organisers received many favourable comments from visitors on the distinction of the buildings and the erudition and friendliness of the stewards.

The arrangements in Ludlow, including the provision of stewards for each building, were co-ordinated by the Civic Society and the Historical Research Group. We are grateful to everyone who helped to make the weekend such a success, particularly the owners and occupiers of the buildings without whose tolerance and generosity the event could not have taken place.

DEREK WILLIAMS

ST. LAURENCE'S AND THE 'GREATER CHURCHES GROUP'

Brian Curnew, Rector and member of the Ludlow Civic Society, reviews the election of St. Laurence's to the 'Greater Churches Group'.

In November 1996 St. Laurence's was admitted to the 'Greater Churches Group' of the Church of England. I have been asked to write why, and what the group is, and what benefits we may expect from membership.

When Tessa and I were looking at calendars for presents before Christmas last year, we chanced on one of 'Cathedrals and Greater Churches'. So an interested Rector ran quickly through the twelve months to check the pictures. Yes, all the pictures were of Cathedrals, or members of the group we had just joined. Very satisfying.

St Laurence's has many thousands of visitors each year. Along with the castle, it is probably the most visited building in our town, in which there are so many that are distinguished. We have always told our visitors that ours is one of the six or so largest parish churches in the country. We may well leave it to them to say what they most admire, both as to its architecture

and its contents. We know that there are a number of things which are indeed outstanding: the tower, the porch (one of three medieval hexagonal porches in England), some of the glass, and especially the misericords in the high chancel.

"It's more like a cathedral than a church", they often say, and in fact our bishop is now on record as saying that it is "effectively the cathedral for the Shropshire part of the diocese of Hereford". St Laurence's being where and as it is, it is used for a large number of Services which you do not find in most parish churches. It has an important role in Ludlow's civic life. In recent months we have hosted District and County Services, and big diocesan events too. At our normal Sunday Services, especially from April to October, there are always visitors to welcome, in much the same way as there are in a cathedral.



Tewkesbury Abbey, Gloucestershire

Whether A.E.Housman meant to make our church famous, I doubt. But its association with him and "Shropshire Lad" also puts us on some travellers maps. He is regarded highly in Japan. That is why we have a particular number of Japanese visitors, and a leaflet in Japanese.

We are of course in most printed guides, in a number with the entry we are invited to submit. This year it is especially pleasing to be one of the hundred places marked on English Heritage's promotional map, called 'England's Christian Heritage', to mark the 1400th anniversary of the landing of St. Augustine on these shores. It shows sites of many kinds. Apart from cathedrals, there are only a handful of churches.

With a church like this, visited and used as it is, come opportunities and challenges. How to welcome our visitors, and help them make the most of their visit. The pattern of worship we should be offering, in a place with a strong local and congregational base, which nonetheless should be serving people who are joining us perhaps just the once whilst on holiday. They may not be regular churchgoers in their own place - so we have a ministry of wider bearing than our local one. Many visitors leave requests for prayers.

We have this great building also to preserve and maintain: costly, and a lot of work too. We need experts to advise us; relationships with various authorities ecclesiastical and secular, with grant-making bodies, English Heritage to the fore. We have recently appointed an Administrator, and this is proving a great benefit to us, especially in matters relating to the building.

I have written these things, many of them familiar, for a simple reason. These are things we share in many ways with cathedrals - and with a small number of other churches. They are of a kind which members of the Greater Churches Group have in common.

The Group is not very old. About six years ago, the Administrator of Tewkesbury Abbey undertook some research to see whether the things which exercised people there are shared by people and clergy in other places. He was not surprised to find that they are. He asked those whom he had involved in his research

whether they would like to send representatives to a meeting, and at the end of the meeting they decided to 'stay together'. Then there were fourteen, amongst them places like Bath Abbey, Beverley Minster, Hexham Abbey, St. Mary Redcliffe in Bristol and, clearly, Tewkesbury Abbey. Since then they have had a conference every other year, benefiting from the mutual support and cross-reference.

So an informal group began. In 1995 their Conference was reported in the 'Church Times', and your Rector wrote to the Chairman as a result, asking what qualifications were required for membership. When he replied, we seemed to satisfy the Group's criteria on every count! I learned quickly that St. Laurence's brings both the opportunities and challenges to which I referred earlier. I had thought already that they must be shared by some other 'greater churches'! Here was the very thing. You don't just walk in, however. In these past few years the Group itself has established relationships with various agencies, statutory and other, insurers and the like, to negotiate with the benefit of this mutual support. If such a group is to be taken seriously, it has to be what it says it is. So we went through correspondence, meetings and yes, reference-taking too. "What is a Greater Church if not ours?", you might well ask. We had to present our credentials.

Now the Greater Churches Group has come of age - not just because we bring its number to eighteen, but because developments over the past few years have also been giving, what started informally, a more formal status. It's in The Church of England's Year Book now as a recognised and recognisable body. It's good to be part of it.

All this will have said something, I hope, of what it means now to us to be a member church. It really does place us on the map. It means something to people when you can say, "yes, it is actually one of the Greater Churches of England", or write it, for instance in the materials for the new Fabric Trust for St. Laurence's, Ludlow. It should help us when we send them to grant-making bodies, and to other award-making trusts. Last, but not least, we hope that being a Greater Church plays its part in commending our town. Who knows, St. Laurence's may be in a calendar you're given next Christmas.

BRIAN CURNEW

continued from page 2

THE BUILDING OF THE LUDLOW UNION WORKHOUSE

When the first paupers and officers of the Union moved into the workhouse in the spring of 1839, a number of building faults and some surprising design omissions became apparent. The roof leaked; ventilation was unsatisfactory; the flooring broke up and emitted an unpleasant smell. No accommodation had been provided for vagrants or for the resident schoolmaster and schoolmistress. As early as 1845 more serious structural weaknesses manifested themselves: tie plates were needed to pin together the main walls of the administration block - and can still be seen today! The story of building the Ludlow workhouse reflects little

credit on the planning, budgeting, architectural or building skills of the early Victorians. Nevertheless large parts of the original building still survive. After many changes of use and ownership they are now part of the greatly improved and extended Ludlow Community Hospital, and are probably making a more valuable contribution to the life of Ludlow and district today than at any time since the first paupers moved in more than 150 years ago.

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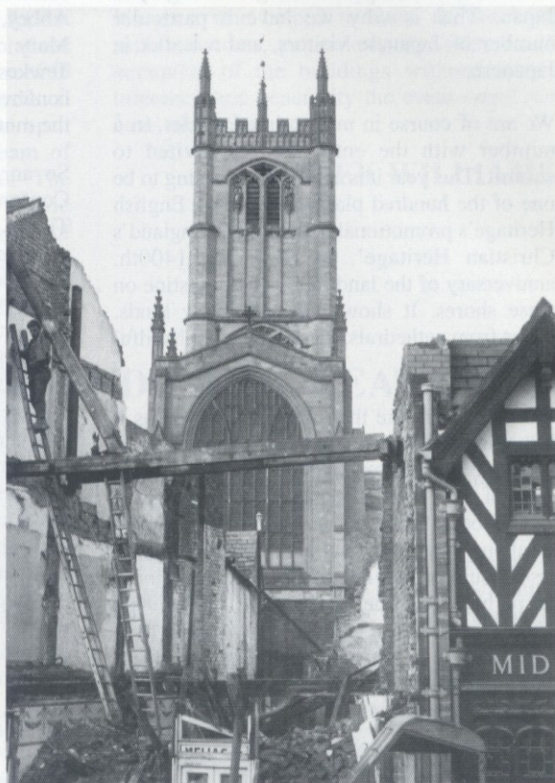
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THE FABRIC TRUST FOR ST. LAURENCE'S, LUDLOW

The care and protection of many fine historic buildings is one of the aims of the Ludlow Civic Society. Members will be pleased to know, therefore, that the Society has taken an important part in establishing a Fabric Trust for St. Laurence's Parish Church, one of Ludlow's few Grade I listed buildings - and arguably the finest of them all. The Society is one of four local bodies which have formed the Trust, the others being St. Laurence's Parochial Church Council, the Friends of St. Laurence and the Ludlow Town Council. The Society's immediate past Chairman, Stephen Dornan, and its present Chairman, David Lloyd, have been members of the small steering committee which has set up the Trust over the last eighteen months and negotiated its registration with the Charity Commission, while David Lloyd is one of the five Trustees who are now responsible for the management of the Trust. The Society has contributed £250 to the initial costs of establishing the Trust and several individual members have already made financial contributions.

The Trust's Chairman is George Kellet, M.B.E., formerly Chief Executive of South Shropshire District Council. George's firm but good humoured chairmanship has got the Trust off to an excellent start and his willingness to delegate ensures that his fellow Trustees and many other people are already fully involved in its promotion. A north countryman by birth, George cares passionately for the town of his adoption, and though not a churchman himself he sees St. Laurence's as being "at the very heart of Ludlow", to be enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. He has insisted that this should be a secular Trust, its aims being to "maintain, repair, restore, preserve and re-construct for the benefit of the public" the fabric of the church. The building, however, remains in the ownership of the Rector and the P.C.C. and it is they who will decide the work needed to keep the fabric in order. It was George who urged that "preserving for posterity" should be part of our logo, and that this should be done by "ensuring a continuous income that will cover the estimated costs of keeping the building in order for the foreseeable future".

All the Trustees are fully aware of the architectural importance of St. Laurence's, but, should this ever be forgotten, then they will be firmly reminded by the writer that this is one of England's grandest churches, a status confirmed by its recent election to the Greater Churches Group. In 1540 John Leland, recording churches and monasteries all over England, described St. Laurence's as "... very fayr and large and richly adorned and taken for the fayrest in all these Quarters". When the Trust was launched in early March, I described St. Laurence's as a "temple of magnificence" and "a treasure house of artistic achievement", the soaring heights of which bear witness to the



An unusual photograph of the tower and east end of St Laurence's parish church, taken when No. 8 Bull Ring was demolished to make way for an extension to the Midland Bank

prosperity - and the piety - of medieval Ludlovians. The maintenance costs of this lovely building have always been great and at roughly fifty year intervals a major restoration has been necessary, the last of these being in the 1950s, when the problems of St. Laurence's seemed to inspire the whole community. We need that spirit again if the current campaign is to be successful.

No one understands the precise fabric problems of St. Laurence's more clearly than my fellow Trustee, Ellis Shaw, formerly Director of Technical Services at South Shropshire District Council. Ellis has served St. Laurence's for some forty-five years, for many of them as honorary Clerk of Works, and he is currently Chairman of the Friends of St. Laurence. He tells us that the huge surface area of the fabric - which is about one acre - and its exposed ridge-top position exacerbate the structural problems. The stones of which St. Laurence's is built - local limestone and sandstone - are comparatively soft and have weak bedding planes, while the clay lenses in the sandstone are quickly eroded. There is much erosion of stone detailing at window openings, while lamination of the wall surface is very evident. Some re-leading of the roof has taken place but large areas still need attention because of cracking and their water-worn condition. One of Ellis's particular concerns is the Lady's Window at the west end of the north aisle, the restoration of which is urgent and will cost some £40,000 - and this is only one of the 58 windows in the church!.



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As the P.C.C.'s representative on the Fabric Trust, Chris Jeffery is involved with the day-to-day maintenance of the church, and is anxious that this should be on a sound financial footing. The P.C.C. wishes to be able to plan the repair programme with the architect, "knowing that the money will be there". The planning will be done in conjunction with English Heritage in order to obtain maximum grant aid. Chris has studied covenanting procedure on behalf of the Trustees, and advises us that the best way to provide this income is to persuade donors to covenant their giving over at least four years, so that the Trust can claim back an extra 29% in tax rebate. Single gifts of any size are welcome too, of course, and if they are £250 or more we can recover tax on those too. For the really generous, however, with gifts of £5,000,000, these have to be spread over two years so that the Treasury can afford the rebate!

As a long standing P.C.C. member, Chris tells us persuasively why the Trust is necessary and why the congregation can't raise the money themselves. It costs £65,000 a year to run St. Laurence's, most of which comes from direct giving by the congregation. Half of this goes to the diocese as parish share, £5,000 goes to this Trust, and £12,500 pays the insurance on the building, which is valued at £16,000,000. We all share his belief that we can't ask the congregation for any more - and accept that the wider community must be involved.

Our fifth Trustee, who speaks for that wider community, is Councillor Owen Elias, the present Mayor of Ludlow. Brought up as a Baptist in South Wales, Owen sees himself as "an unlikely advocate for a church building", which he sees every day from his house in Linney, and for which he feels a sense of "awe and wonder". As one who attends the church for civic occasions, Owen is aware of the importance of St. Laurence's and urges the need for a secular trust which operates independently of the church management. A

former committee member of this Society, Owen knows that the conservation record of Ludlow is good but that some disasters have occurred, most recently 18, Castle Street. At the launch Owen used trick photography to show us what Ludlow would look like from Whitcliffe without its church tower, and reminded us of the well-known lines from Housman's Shropshire Lad.

*Leave your home behind, lad,
And reach your friends your hand,
And go, and luck go with you,
While Ludlow tower shall stand.*

And then he left us with a rallying cry: "Our logo is 'Preserving for Posterity' - LET'S DO IT". This is true Mayoral leadership - but the rest of us must follow!

The Trustees have all been mentioned but they cannot do this work alone. They have been fortunate enough to find a dedicated and highly competent secretary, Dorothy Jeffery, and hers is now almost a full time job, rewarded by only a small honorarium. The Jeffery home at Steventon is indeed the nerve centre of this whole operation, and brochures and envelopes are liable to cascade on the unwary visitor. Others are coming forward to take up particular tasks, among them Civic Society member and Church Warden elect, Pat Perry, who is secretary to those who offered at the launch to be our supporters and ambassadors, the core of what we hope will be a great army of people, approaching others on the Trust's behalf, seeking gifts and covenants.

The Trust is still in its early days but to date our income - including substantial grants from the P.C.C. and the Town Council - is nearly £20,000, a useful spring-board for further advance. We hope that people from across the country - indeed from across the world - will respond generously to our appeal for help, but my particular plea, as the current chairman of



This oblique aerial view of St. Laurence's brings out the huge extent of its roofs and walls, which together give an exposed surface of about one acre.

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ST. LAURENCE'S FABRIC TRUST

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Ludlow Civic Society, is to our members, both those who live in Ludlow and also to those loyal supporters of Ludlow who live elsewhere. If you wish to know more about the Trust, and in particular if you would like to become a supporter - for just £5 a year - please let us know by filling in the form provided with this issue of Ludlow Heritage News.

The Society has a fine record, both collectively and individually, of supporting causes such as this. Older members will recall that Fred Reeves, an outstanding Chairman for so many years, was one of the key people in the restoration of the 1950s. No building in Ludlow is so precious as St. Laurence's or more central to our aims of preserving all that is best and good in this most lovely of towns. PLEASE do what you can to help us - we have a responsibility to all those who made Ludlow what it is and to those who wish to enjoy it in the future.

DAVID LLOYD

1997-98 PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

Most of the work in developing next year's programme of public meetings has now been completed by our joint programme secretaries, Gillian Sharpe and Maureen Sykes. This autumn's programme is now arranged and appears below. There are still some details to be firmed up for the rest of the year and the full programme will appear on next year's Membership Cards.

Wednesday, 10 September 1997

'Broadlands, Romsey, Hants.'

Barry Sherratt MA will be speaking on the house and its fine 18th century art architecture and furniture, with some surprises from other periods!

Saturday/Sunday, 27 & 28 September 1997

Weekend excursion to Oxford

led by David Lloyd, with overnight accommodation at Wadham College

Wednesday, 8 October 1997

Colin Richards, Conservation Officer for the South Shropshire District Council, will speak on a variety of 'Current Conservation Issues'

Wednesday, 5 November 1997

The Reeves Memorial Lecture

'Cruck Buildings in Shropshire'

Madge Moran

Another 'Social' event is planned for early in the New Year following the success of similar events for the last two years.

The Ludlow Historical Research Group has agreed to repeat this year's format of an evening's presentation on current research being undertaken by its members, and this will be in the early part of 1998. 'The building of the Ludlow Union Workhouse' which appears as an article in this edition of Heritage News, was part of one of this year's presentations.

Annual Subscription: £5.00 per member
 Meeting Fees:

Members: £1.00 per meeting
 Non Members: £2.50 per meeting

All meetings except the AGM will take place in the Ludlow Assembly Rooms and commence at 7:30 p.m.

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