

Ludlow *Heritage*

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N E W S



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FREE

Luck of
The 'Lad'

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Welsh Capital

Programme
and Events

LUCK OF THE 'LAD'

*'When smoke stood up from Ludlow,
And mist blew off from Teme'*

This stunning shot by Ludlow's foremost photographer, Gareth Thomas, is one of nearly one hundred appearing in his 'Shropshire Lad' illustrated book. The publication was launched by Merlin Unwin Books in 2009 and has, not surprisingly, enjoyed two reprints. Gareth's striking images appear in countless other books and journals and, as prints, hang in houses worldwide.

Two memorable views – one in the form of a hilltop vista and the other by way of a man's voiced opinion – have combined to serve the county of Shropshire with its most generous slice of literary luck. Fame and immortality have been the offspring of the union.

Some time in the second half of 1895, one ALFRED WILLIAM POLLARD is said to have crossed the threshold of 'Byron Cottage' in Highgate, North London; he had been invited there by a former student colleague at Oxford

University to read and make comment upon a collection of poems written by the same student friend. They were about to be offered to a publisher under the title of 'Poems by Terence Hearsay'. What Pollard did next was crucial.

He not only advised that the title be changed but that the hitherto anonymous author be persuaded to add his name.

By March of 1896, the immortal title of 'A Shropshire Lad' by A.E.Housman was offered to the world. The book was initially published by Kegan Paul, but at Housman's expense. It has never since been out of print.

Exactly what this slim volume of near-monosyllabic verses has

Continued overleaf

LUCK OF THE 'LAD' (continued)

meant to Shropshire in terms of world-wide fame, visitor attraction, even hard tourist-trade cash, may only be guessed at. And guessed at by, among others, the poet's own younger brother. Laurence Housman, himself a prolific playwright and author, had no doubt at all about the great and lasting service done to this county's standing. He wrote in his 'Memoir' '.....that small book of poems has given to Shropshire place-names an added romance comparable to that which attaches to the place-names of Hardy's novels....but I wonder what would have happened had the poems been published under the title originally chosen

for them.' Laurence further wrote that the change in title 'must have had a considerable effect upon its fortunes' (one is tempted to add... upon Shropshire's too!). Pollard's inspired suggestion of 'A Shropshire Lad' was, he said, 'a piece of good advice which the author luckily was not above taking'.

Although the title was initially slow in retail uptake, it found enormous favour in later years. It has been a rich source for musical settings such as the 1909 offering 'On Wenlock Edge' by Ralph Vaughan Williams, and has likewise proved an inspirational magnet for scores of artists and photographers. In the last decade even scripts for

those popular TV detectives, Lewis and Frost have included 'Into my heart.... blue remembered hills'. A little more commercially, I may now shop at the Ludlow Food Centre for 'Remembered Hills' cheese and, maybe, wash it down with a bottle of 'Shropshire Lad' ale from Edward Wood's brewery. The same two-verse poem allows me to browse a 'Lost Content' museum at Craven Arms, though for a proper appreciation of the poet's 'Loveliest of trees, the cherry....' I should perhaps journey further afield – to the Housman Society branch in Japan!

As much as good fortune attached to the change of title, it was even more a stroke of luck that Shropshire was mentioned at all. Housman, after all, was a Worcestershire man – born on 26th March 1859 at Fockbury near Bromsgrove – and nearly all of the sixty-three poems within the covers of ASL were written in London. He selected Shropshire as his landscape of imagery simply because of emotions experienced in youth. 'I am Worcestershire by birth,' he wrote in 1934, 'Shropshire was our Western horizon, which made me feel romantic about it. I do not know the county well, except in parts, and some of my topographical details are wrong

and imaginary.' In childhood, the Housman siblings often climbed a local hill which they referred to as the biblical 'Mount Pisgah'. Alfred was ever after nostalgic about views of the distant Shropshire hills, and it was happy chance that the very first line of the very first poem in ASL should read 'From Cleve to heaven the beacon burns'. But what if the budding poet and classicist had expressed a preference for other hills? Or, maybe, become emotional about the horizons to

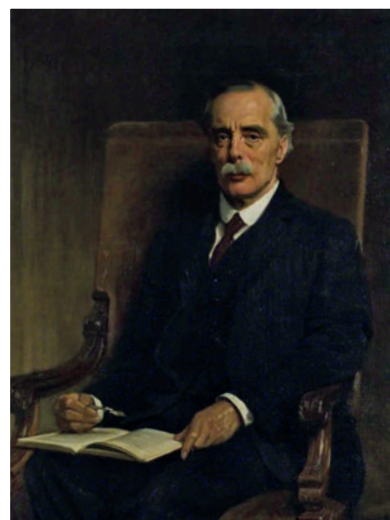


Photo credit British Library

Alfred W Pollard was the Oxford student friend of Housman who suggested a change of title to 'A Shropshire Lad'. He joined the staff of the British Museum in 1883, and by 1919 was Keeper of Printed Books. From 1893 to 1934 he was Honorary Secretary of the Bibliographical Society. Thus TWO alpha Alfreds of great scholarly achievement. Pollard died in 1944.



A E HOUSMAN at the age of 35 years in 1894.

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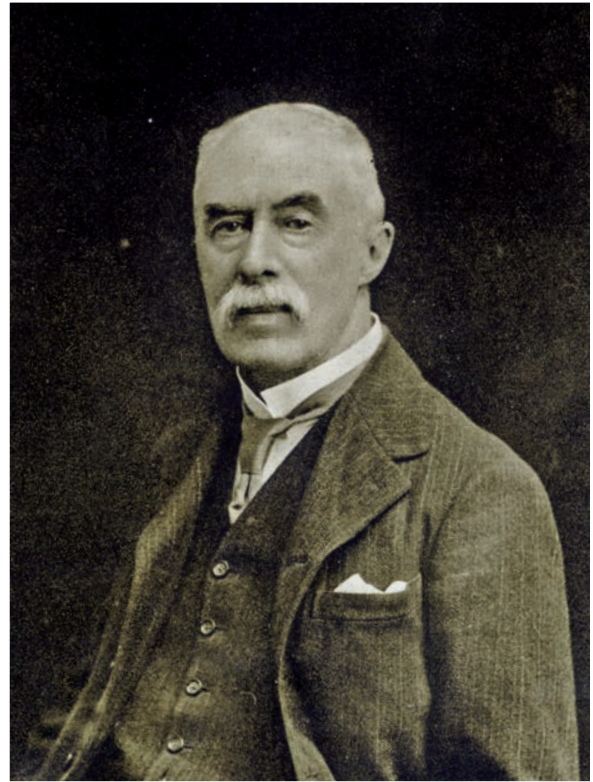
the North, South or East? Clearly a Muse of poetry must have climbed in Housman's footsteps and been on Shropshire's side. Possibly 'Sabrina' was hiking as well.

Housman's confession of topographical waywardness was very quickly confirmed by the evidence of his brother. 'It happened in the same year 'A Shropshire Lad' was published,' wrote Laurence. 'I went to stay with friends at Buildwas; and finding that Hughley and its steeple were only five miles away, I went over to look at the 'far-known sign' (ASL LX1) and the graves of 'suicides' on the north side of the tower. When I reached it I found that the 'far-known sign' was buried away in a valley, and that the 'suicides' were, most of them, respectable church-wardens and wives of vicars, all in neatly-tended graves.' He then added, 'When I reproached Alfred for his romantic falsification of local history his explanation was that the place he really meant had an ugly name so he substituted 'Hughley'. 'I did not apprehend,' he wrote me, 'that the faithful would be making pilgrimages to these holy places.' But that is what has now happened.'

A Shropshire connection – this time with **no** falsification – lay at the very roots of Housman's classical scholarship and love of poetry. One of several prizes which he won at Bromsgrove School was a book which, he said, had first directed him to classical studies 'and implanted in me a genuine liking for Greek and Latin'. This was a copy of 'Sabrinae Corolla', a book of English poetry translated into those languages and edited

by that eminent Head and scholar of Shrewsbury School, Benjamin Hall Kennedy. Who could possibly have guessed that the schoolboy clutching his Speech Day prize would celebrate 1911 by himself being installed as Kennedy Professor of Latin in the University of Cambridge? It placed him at the pinnacle of his chosen profession.

From half a century ago, I recall a remark made by the late Enoch Powell MP, who studied under Housman, and who described his professor as 'the most charismatic of people I knew'. Something altogether lighter came from the late Ludlow constituency Member, Sir Jasper More of Linley. He chanced to be dining in hall within earshot of Housman when some of the dons fell to chatting about the 'new' form of travel, the aeroplane. One don stated firmly that aeroplanes could NOT carry luggage. Housman glanced up from his soup course to say, 'I happen to know they CAN.' Surprisingly, the prim Latin scholar who appeared deficient in adventurous body bones, was particularly well qualified to know about the new-fangled flying machines. From as early as 1920 he made annual holiday flights to the Continent and, on one occasion, noted the novelty of having a uniformed 'waiter' on board to serve him with cheese and biscuits. However, observations to his sister Katherine after another such jaunt were of a far more alarming nature. He wrote to her: 'On the return journey we were two hours late in starting because the machine required repairs, having been damaged on the previous day BY



A E HOUSMANS passport photograph when aged 70 years.

A PASSENGER WHO BUTTED HIS HEAD THROUGH THE WINDOW TO BE SICK!'

No better comments on the relationship between Housman's verse and Shropshire exist beyond those of the author and educationalist, Keith Jebb, who was born and raised in the county and who wrote 'A.E. Housman' for the Border Lines series in 1992. 'The first thing to say about Housman's Shropshire is that it is not, and never was, the county on the Welsh

Border normally represented by that name.....it is more that in 'creating' Shropshire, he produced a stage, a little world in which to set in motion the characters, the emotions and the dramas that he needed to portray. What he produced is therefore much closer to Tolkein's Middle Earth than to the historically-rooted accuracy of Hardy's Wessex.'

Accuracy of topographical detail may not have caused Housman any great concern but accuracy on

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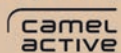
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For over forty years it was supposed that the very private burial of Housman's ashes at Ludlow Parish Church had passed unrecorded. This grainy photograph is taken from a negative of Mr Howard Corbishley, a former Traveller with the Ludlow Corn Merchants, Marston Bros. On the evening of 25 July 1936 he guessed 'something important was going on' so he snapped with his Box Brownie. We cannot identify individuals in the photo but "relatives present included Professor Housman's two sisters, Miss Clemence Housman and Mrs E W Symonds; his only surviving brother Mr Laurence Housman; one of his nephews Dr A D Symonds, and Mrs A D Symonds" (Bromsgrove Messenger 1/8/1936). The photo came to light in 1979.

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the printed page most assuredly did. He waged a life-long battle with printers over the misplacing or omission of punctuation marks to 'destroy' his verse and rhythm. In fact, in a brief introductory note to 'Last Poems' of 1922, the printer must have choked at being told to set 'it is better that what I have written should be printed while I am here to see it through the press and control its spelling and punctuation.' The scholar-poet's view of accuracy on the printed page – to hell with geography that didn't suit – was that it was not a virtue but a duty. His reply to a lady who regretted that she had not been able to buy a First Edition of 'Last Poems' and had to content herself with a Second, exemplifies this passion: 'In that case you have the more valuable edition. In the first, two commas are missing.' Irksome, too, was the frequent misspelling of his name – usually Houseman with an e (as appears even today) – and once, very spitefully, 'this Houseboat person'. Yet it was impish amusement rather than annoyance that was kindled by

constant confusion between himself and his brother. Each was credited with the other's publications.

Given his regard for accuracy in print, it was perverse in the extreme that such an error should pursue Alfred Edward Housman unto his grave. In arranging for burial of the ashes near the north wall of Ludlow Parish Church, Laurence gave to a local stonemason very precise instructions about every character, spacing, dot and comma with which to adorn a tablet of stone. But shock – horror – drama! The draft for approval showed a proposed chiselling of 'Arthur' instead of 'Alfred'. The letter urging correction is still preserved in Ludlow Museum archives as is one to the Rector detailing this 'extraordinary mistake'. True to form, at least one newspaper managed to oblige the gremlins with a 'Houseman' in its obituary notice.

Given the very private nature of the ceremony on the evening of 25th July 1936, it was satisfying that some slight Shropshire 'thank you' to Housman had been expressed

during his lifetime. Appropriately, it was voiced in Ludlow and, just as fittingly, by a fellow poet. In July 1934, John Drinkwater had written five 'Historical Episodes' to be performed at the great 'Shropshire Historical Pageant', played in the main at Ludlow Castle, with Queen Mary as patroness. Drinkwater had once met Housman socially to talk about poetry and, in 1917, had himself won inspiration for a sonnet by a first visit to the Castle, and specifically, 'to the Hall where 'Comus' was first produced'. Now, in conjunction with the Pageant's 'Prologue Writer', Sir Owen Seaman, he composed other very much shorter lines by way of a programme dedication.

To
A.E.Housman
who has made
Shropshire
Memorable in English Poetry

Near the opening of this article, I quoted the question posed by Laurence Housman and find it is

one I now wish to echo:

I wonder what would have happened had the poems been published under the title originally chosen for them?

Lovers of 'A Shropshire Lad' primarily admire this little book for the simplicity, beauty and poignancy of Housman's poems. Yet those who live in this county should, perhaps, reserve a small part of their appreciation for that very good friend who was not afraid to give the poet advice.

In matters of the heart it is universally accepted that 'just three little words can make all the difference'. For those three little words that form 'A Shropshire Lad', it is Alfred William Pollard who should join Alfred Edward Housman to accept our salute. All Shropshire must rejoice that his inspired choice was accepted and that the leading Latin scholar of his day should have agreed to add his own name to the book. Thus, 'Shropshire' and 'Ludlow' are writ large for all time. Would 'Hearsay' have done it?

David Edwards

1 Not 'Arthur': Alfred.

2. The general effect is too scattered; it needs grouping to give it proportion. Make the following alterations:
Top margin half an inch more.
Spaces between the three first lines of verse
Space between 3rd & 4th line same as now
Spaces between 4th, 5th & 6th lines $\frac{1}{8}$ in: less.
Space between 6th & 7th line same as now

"NOT 'Arthur': Alfred!"

Notes sent to the stonemason after Laurence Housman discovered the 'extraordinary mistake' on the rough for his brother's memorial.

I am the more inclined to ask for having, to make sure that he has got my alternative right, because he made the extraordinary mistake of putting Arthur instead of Alfred!

From now on, I take it, I can correspond direct with Mr Griffin, without troubling you. Will you kindly ask him to let me know how soon he thinks the stones can be finished?

Yours sincerely
Laurence Housman

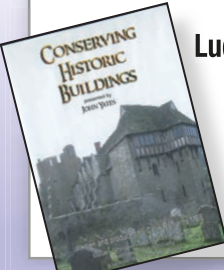
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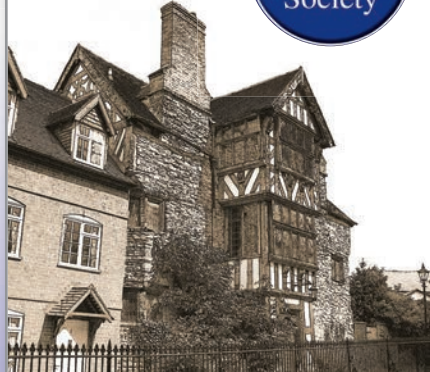
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AN OLD WELSH CAPITAL

This interesting little essay, full of period charm, was given to us by the son of the Rev. D.M.Griffin, Mr Paul Griffin, a well-known Ludlow citizen.

A town before the conquest and mentioned as Lude in the Domesday records, Ludlow, standing supreme in the rich beauty of Shropshire, is a treasure-house of memories.

From such a beginning it grew until it reached a marked prosperity in the 12th Century. Its greatest years, however, were those during which it was the headquarters of the Council of the Marches, which met frequently in the Castle, the President's official residence. Perhaps the best-known President was Sir Henry Sydney, whose young son, later the famous Sir Philip Sydney, rode from here to school in

Shrewsbury. The turbulent history of these years left Ludlow deeply scarred but rich in fame.

It is interesting to recall that the first church of this old town was a little Saxon sanctuary, and in the Castle grounds the ruin of a round Norman chapel still remains. To-day, in complete contrast, a magnificent church rises with tall grace. Its spacious interior is enriched by fine glass and 15th century carving. Its stall and misereres are of unique interest.

As background to a pageant of many of Ludlow's richest memories is the Castle, and one may be forgiven for recalling the obvious. Ruined but beautiful, it stands with stately grandeur, a silent tribute to the glory of past centuries. It was inhabited until the reign of George I, and many famous names are linked with its history. From its walls, the ill-fated young Edward V set off for London and his early death. Here, too, in the Great Hall, the first performance of Milton's *Masque of Comus* took place, when its author was but twenty-six. To-day, its grand outline speaks of the

strength which enabled it to remain the last Shropshire stronghold to surrender to Cromwell.

Ludlow has many treasures. A Butter Cross, certainly only two centuries old, but replacing an older one; a Grammar School whose fabric and foundation have few rivals in the matter of age; and a timber and plaster house founded in 1674 as an 'almshouse for old women' are but a few. These and many more go to make up this old-world country town.

Charm, too, is found in the streets of Ludlow. Black and white houses mingle with modern ones and afford a wealth of interest and beauty. Of Elizabethan ones, the famous Feathers Inn is the finest example, and the Reader's House in Church Yard adds to the rich store. The Regency fronts in Corve Street are some of the finest in the country; and the Georgian merchant houses in Broad Street claim their share of interest. But this charm lies deeper. There is a calm, unhurried atmosphere in Ludlow, as if the town lingered with its history in the past, remaining a

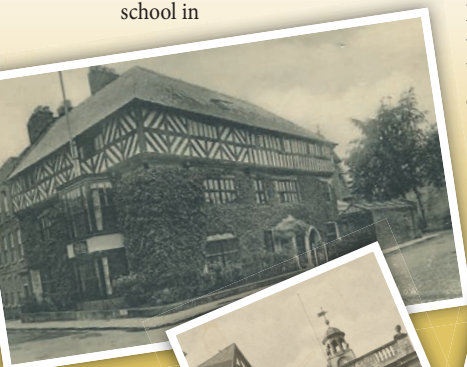
little aloof from the rush of modern life.

It is not difficult in such an old-world place to call to mind its many customs and revelries. One of these, the shrove-tide rope-pulling, was kept up until 1850. Again, a glimpse back into the 18th Century shows this quiet country town gay and fashionable, with a Season.

A traveller leaving Ludlow by way of Ludford Bridge would follow a very ancient road. This picturesque bridge spans the river Teme. It is at least seven centuries old, and may be Norman. With tall trees lining its bank on one side, the Teme splashes over rough stones past the nearby Castle. To stand on this bridge and bid farewell to Ludlow is to step back, momentarily, into history, and it would be difficult to suppress a desire to return again, and to find this gem of Shropshire unchanged.

*Halford Vicarage
Craven arms
Shropshire*

D. M. Griffin




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COMMITTEE *News*

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES



Street cobbles form part of Ludlow's character. They have separated the roads from the pavements and houses for centuries around the centre of the town. There is a system in place to ensure that the cobbles are put back correctly after digging up by contractors usually working on behalf of the Utility companies.

Unfortunately, the system (operated by Shropshire Council) has failed to carry out any checks on work carried out by contractors in recent years. It is now at a stage where no-one is prepared to take any responsibility for the appalling state of the cobbles in the town. Some of them are now unattractive and a hazard to pedestrians. A sub-group of the Civic Society Committee has been formed to see what can be done.

The initial survey has highlighted the extent of the problem, and a further survey, with the help of householders and businesses affected will reveal the various utility and private contractor companies concerned. The intention is to work

closely with the water, electricity and gas installers to have a joint effect to repair the cobbles, effectively using trained workers employed through the Civic Society. This may be a first in the country and it requires a lot of time and effort by the Civic Society and the utility companies to succeed. The only absentee from the table is BT, the biggest offender after ripping up cobbles and laying concrete down badly afterwards for many years. This is perhaps not surprising since they have taken two years NOT to remove an offending telephone pole in the Jubilee Garden. This is severely holding up that project!

Dan Lloyd

TALKS AND EVENTS

Once again we thank you all for attending our last series of lectures. We certainly covered a wide range of subjects from the gardens of Gertrude Jekyll, through Ludlow and the First World War, to the World of Wild Swimming! This autumn/

winter, after the fascinating talk on Agincourt, we offer Children's Pop-up Books on 11th November, the almshouses of Ludlow on 13th January, the Newlyn School of British Impressionism on 10th February and Aspects of Design in Ludlow

on 9th March. All of these lectures have been arranged for us brilliantly by Penny Wake.

We will warmly welcome you to these events in the Oscars Room at Ludlow Assembly Rooms. Please note the new start time is 7 p.m. This year's Christmas Party is on

Wednesday 9th December and will be held in St Laurence's Church at 5.30 p.m. The early start is to enable our guests who want to attend the talk given by Dr Rowan Williams at the Assembly Rooms later that evening, to be able to fit in both events.

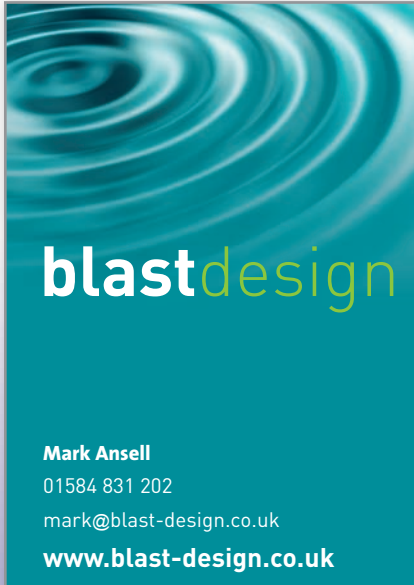


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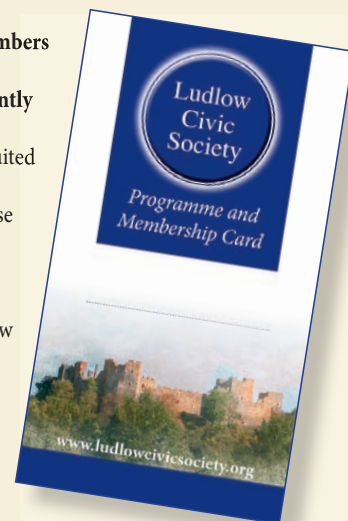
Committee Members: Jane Hunt, Tony Mahalski, John Nash,
Anthony Shuster, Stanton Stephens, Valerie Thomas,
Hinny Varley, Penny Wake

We have welcomed many new members to the Society over the past year, particularly people who have recently moved to Ludlow.

We are also pleased to have recruited several Corporate members from Ludlow's business community whose logos will appear on our website and more! It has been enjoyable sometimes to talk or write to members who used to live in Ludlow many decades ago, and who have interesting memories of days gone by. I have encouraged these former Ludlovians to send those recollections for inclusion in this magazine.

Members will be aware from their programme cards that the monthly talks will now begin at 7 p.m. It is greatly appreciated when members pay by standing order as this reduces postage and paperwork, and, of course, by completing Gift Aid forms, we all achieve an increase in revenue.

Jane Hunt



**To: The Membership Secretary, Ludlow Civic Society,
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