

Ludlow *Heritage*



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N E W S

FREE

Dinham Bridge
and John Straphen

Inside this issue

A Winter
playground

Eel Traps
return to Dinham

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

Dinham Bridge and John Straphen

Richard Hurlock

The Ludlow landmark of the present Dinham Bridge, built in 1823, was the work of Shrewsbury mason, engineer and contractor, John Straphen. It became his second bridge in the area; an earlier work at Bromfield dates from 1812 and crossed the Onny, at a cost of £2015.¹

In point of fact Thomas Telford was Shropshire's surveyor at the time, a position he held from 1787 until his death in 1834, and the design of the bridge was his responsibility. However, increasing nationwide commitments pushed his official duties into the background and by 1811 his General Accountant and Agent, Thomas Stanton (1782-1846), had assumed the role in all but name.²

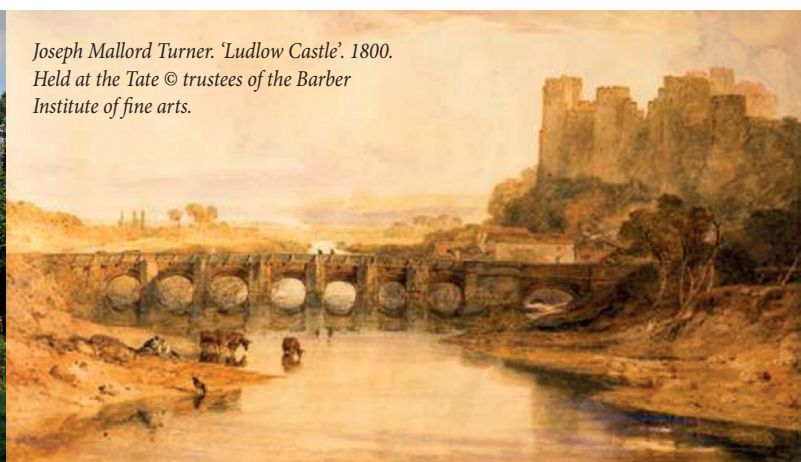
A year before construction, the 'History and Antiquities of the Town of Ludlow' stated that its predecessor was 'a plain wooden bridge on stone piers....opposite the castle', and in 1861 John Evans, a local inhabitant, wrote of the 1823 structure 'supplanting the place of a wooden one'. These assertions create problems.

In dry spells, part of the old stone foundations can still be seen on the downstream side,³ possibly dating as far back as the 1120s when Henry I gave 'the castle of Dinan and all the country round it towards the river of Corve with all the honour' to a favourite knight named Joce,⁴ who from that time took the name of Joce de Dinan. 'This Joce finished the castle

Continued overleaf

A panel painting of the old bridge in the first half of the 18th century





Joseph Mallord Turner. 'Ludlow Castle'. 1800.
Held at the Tate © trustees of the Barber
Institute of fine arts.

which Roger de Montgomery in his time had begun, and...caused to be made below the town of Dynan a bridge of stone and lime, over the river of Temede, into the high road which goes through the March from Chester to Bristol.' There is some doubt which bridge this refers to. However, there are the stone pier remains of an old structure, and roads and crossing points of the time owed more to military consideration than to commerce. The Dinham site is far more suitable for control by the castle than is Ludford which Leyland avers was still a ford at this time.

The bridge was rebuilt in 1649, possibly following flood damage, and is depicted in a prospect of Ludlow 1684 by Thomas Dinely.⁵ It shows a timber bridge of seven openings on stone piers, known as the 'New Bridge' in the 17th century. It was a narrow single-track bridge for pedestrians and packhorses only. This bridge was drawn by Stukely in 1721, but with six openings. The upper timber part of the bridge was supposedly

replaced in brick and stone in 1733, and a view of 1788 that, frustratingly, depicts two arches marching out of the side of the picture, shows that the structure was more substantial before the next date of 1794, when limited work was carried out by Thomas Telford.

More confusion is added by the dating of two views of the bridge, both showing five stone arches, and the sixth mill race arch further apart than the rest. This last feature, designed by Telford, remains today.

The first painting of 1792 is by the magnificently named Julius Caesar Ibbetson⁶ and it not only shows all five stone arches but also a large bastion-like cutwater, possibly providing river access facing downstream between the bridge and mill race. A less detailed work from 1797 by Thomas Hearne shows the same bridge from the other side. The definitive painting of the old bridge comes from the brush of Joseph Turner in 1800 entitled 'Ludlow Castle'.⁷ This clearly shows a seven-arched bridge with stone

piers connected by a large stone buttress to Telford's mill-stream arch. The stone infill between the piers retains the arches but is capped by a timber superstructure.

The width restriction caused by the medieval Dinham Gate had lately been removed and Telford was briefed to widen the existing bridge to take wagons, but the only stone or brick structure contracted for was to build an arch over the stream or mill race from Castle Mill adjoining the New Bridge. This arch remains in a distinctly different style, and at a distance from the other three standing today. It was built in 1794 by the stone-mason William Atkins, builder of the Corve Bridge, who undertook to construct and maintain the single arch for three years at a cost of £48.17⁸ (for maintenance?) The bailiffs were obliged to pay £170 towards the alterations. Construction followed a report and plan prepared by Telford, submitted to the Corporation on 28th October 1794 for 'building an arch over the stream into Mr Burlton's grounds'. Telford

removed the stone parapets from the rest of the bridge and built a cantilevered timber roadway on top of the existing stone piers, that hung out on either side to give sufficient passage to carts and pedestrians.

This adventurous compromise lasted for about twenty-five years until it was deemed insufficient, inconvenient and dangerous,⁹ leading to the town council setting up a (bridge) committee that, after looking into the inevitably cheaper repair option, on 28th October 1822 took the opinion of Mr Straphen, an 'Architect Eminence'. The result was to build a new bridge using as much of the old materials as possible. A builder named Thomas Cook undertook the commission for £600¹⁰ 'to plans drawn by Mr Straphen. The town was to pay only £400, the rest by subscription. Payments were made in stages until October 1826 when there seems to have been a financial problem and the committee directed Mr Gething¹¹ (sic) of Kingsland, the surveyor for Herefordshire, to take Mr Cook's petition and report

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thereon. A year later he replied that the new bridge was worth £1,100 less the materials from the old bridge, and an outstanding amount of £200 was paid.¹² Whatever original stone was pressed into the current bridge, a new foundation stone was laid by Lord Clive in 1823.

At some stage, Straphen formed a partnership firstly with John Stanton¹³ and later with John Hall constructed the Snowdon sections of the Holyhead Mail road where his work won approval from Telford, a noted stickler for perfection.

The bridges at Bromfield and Dinham would seem to be a direct benefit from this association, and the design for both were probably approved in Telford's Design Office under Thomas Stanton. Certainly, in 1822, the unofficial Surveyor undertook to replace Stokesay Bridge over the Onny with a cast iron structure on piers provided by Straphen.

As the nephew of the contractor John Simpson, described by Telford as 'a treasure of talents and

integrity', Straphen had carried out several of his projects before inheriting his uncle's practice in 1815. Simpson had erected Montford Bridge for Telford in 1791-2 and died 23 years later in the midst of erecting the monument to Lord Hill, a major Shrewsbury landmark that rises to the height of 133 feet. Straphen was able to make a seamless transition to principal contractor and the work was completed on 18th June 1816, the anniversary of the battle of Waterloo. Reputedly the largest Grecian doric column in the world, it was designed by Edward Haycock with input by Harrison of Chester and Carline. However, the elegant staircase within the column was the inspiration of the new contractor who erected it at his own expense. He also seems to have provided the opening ceremony refreshments.

Straphen had a brief input with the start of the Menai Bridge in 1819. As Telford records 'Vessels were provided for conveying stone and other materials; working drawings, with a specification, were prepared, and a contract was

entered into with Messrs. Straphen and Hall, experienced builders, to perform the masonry at fixed prices; and on the 10th day of August, the first stone of this great work was laid.'

But by March 1820 there were problems. 'Mr Straphen being prevented by engagements from giving personal attendance, which was indispensable in a work of such magnitude and difficulty, he and Mr Hall were relieved from their contract, and Mr John Wilson undertook it at the same rates, and under the same conditions.' John Wilson was known to all parties as someone who had previously worked with John Simpson and Telford. Other Shrewsbury landmarks would seem to be repairs to St Julian's & St Alkmund's where Straphen heightened and repaired the 1788 perpendicular tower and spire by John Cheshire in 1821.

In the 1818 will of one John Oakley, it appears that Straphen was renting a house with garden in St Julian's Friars, and on 5th March 1823 the Salopian announced: 'to owners and Bargemen. Notice is

hereby given, that no Boat, Barge, Trow or any other Vessel navigating the River Severn, is allowed to load or discharge any Part of their Cargo at the Wharf, situate in St Julian's Friars, Shrewsbury, the Property of the late Mr John Simpson, without applying at the Office of J Straphen, Builder.'

He remained there until his death on 27th July 1826, and was survived by his wife, Sarah, who in 1832 was living in Poplar, Middlesex.

The disposal of his estate announced: 'AUCTION. The Property of the late Mr John Strathen by Mr Smith, in the Timber Yard, Bottom of St Julian's Friars, Shrewsbury, on Thursday, the 12th of October, 1826, at Eleven o'clock. Several logs of Pine and Oak Timber, Two Cranes complete, Oak Timber in Beams and Scantlings, Quantity of Red Deal Planks and Boards, new Doors and Sashes, with a variety of old Building Materials, Work Benches, &c &c. The Whole will be arranged in Lots, and may be inspected the Day prior to the Sale.'

- 1 Biog Dictionary Civil Engineers. Vol 1. Sir Alec Skempton.
- 2 Thomas Stanton, 1782-1846, Engineer and Agent for Ellesmere Canal Co.
- 3 Marked on OS 1st edition 25in map of 1886 as 'Ruins'. Foundations of the medieval Dinham Bridge are visible in the river. Four piers can be seen at low water on the downstream side of the present bridge (SA11160). OS Fl 1967 <1>.
- 4 Romance of Fulke Fitzwarine, a 'peculiar combination of fantasy, error and fact' J. Meisel.
- 5 D. 1695, had some legal training and was considered an antiquary. He sketched and wrote, and came into the employ of Henry 1st Duke of Somerset who was President of the Council of the Marches.
- 6 1759-1817, born in Leeds and a mostly self-taught artist. His great accuracy was recognised in a series of commissions including recording details of the

first British Embassy to Peking. Dinham Bridge was apparently painted on his second Welsh tour.

- 7 Tate Gallery c. Barber Institute of Fine Arts. Watercolour on paper.
- 8 Corporation notes and Shropshire Arch. XLB/7/4/3/5.
- 9 Ludlow, an Historical Anthology, David Lloyd and Peter Klein.
- 10 28. 10. 1823 corporation minutes.
- 11 John Gethin, 1757-1831, stone-mason and first county surveyor of bridges, in 1799. Designed more than 60 bridges. A.W. Skempton, Biog. Dictionary of civil Engineers in GB and Ireland.
- 12 Corporation minutes.
- 13 Brother of Thomas Stanton 1790-1870, contractor and maltster. His son George was engineer for part of the Ellesmere & Chester canal.



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A Winter

Derek Beattie



The winters in late Victorian and Edwardian England were much colder than they are now, and the freezing over of stretches of water was almost an annual event. Both the pool at Ledwyche and Oakley Park water were often frozen and became skating playgrounds for many in Ludlow. Such an activity was so common that many local people had their own skates. This meant that at weekends many hundreds of all social classes could be seen enjoying themselves sliding and skating on the covering ice. Such winter pastimes became so popular that, in 1907, the local aristocracy and gentry even formed a curling club, constructing a rink at Bromfield near the racecourse. Almost certainly this was on one of the pools at the gravel pits on the site of the old Roman camp.

During a few winters the temperatures fell so low that even the River Teme would freeze over, especially the deep waters near the Castle and at Waterside. When this occurred in 1895, the enterprising landlord of the Imperial Vaults organised an evening ice carnival lit by lamps and torches. Over six hundred skaters glided over the ice to tunes played by the Town Band, with many more of the populace arriving to spectate and, no doubt, to dance on the Castle Walks.

If the pictures that cover the period from the 1880s to the outbreak of the First World War are studied closely, you will see young men with home-made hockey sticks showing that a form of ice hockey was played at such times. It almost seems that if you did not have your own skates, local entrepreneurs would hire you a pair, as the young lady having them placed on her feet appears to show. In addition, in an age when the social class to which you belonged often dictated your leisure habits, these photographs show that public skating on ice appears to have been one of the few occasions when all could join together to enjoy nature's gift.

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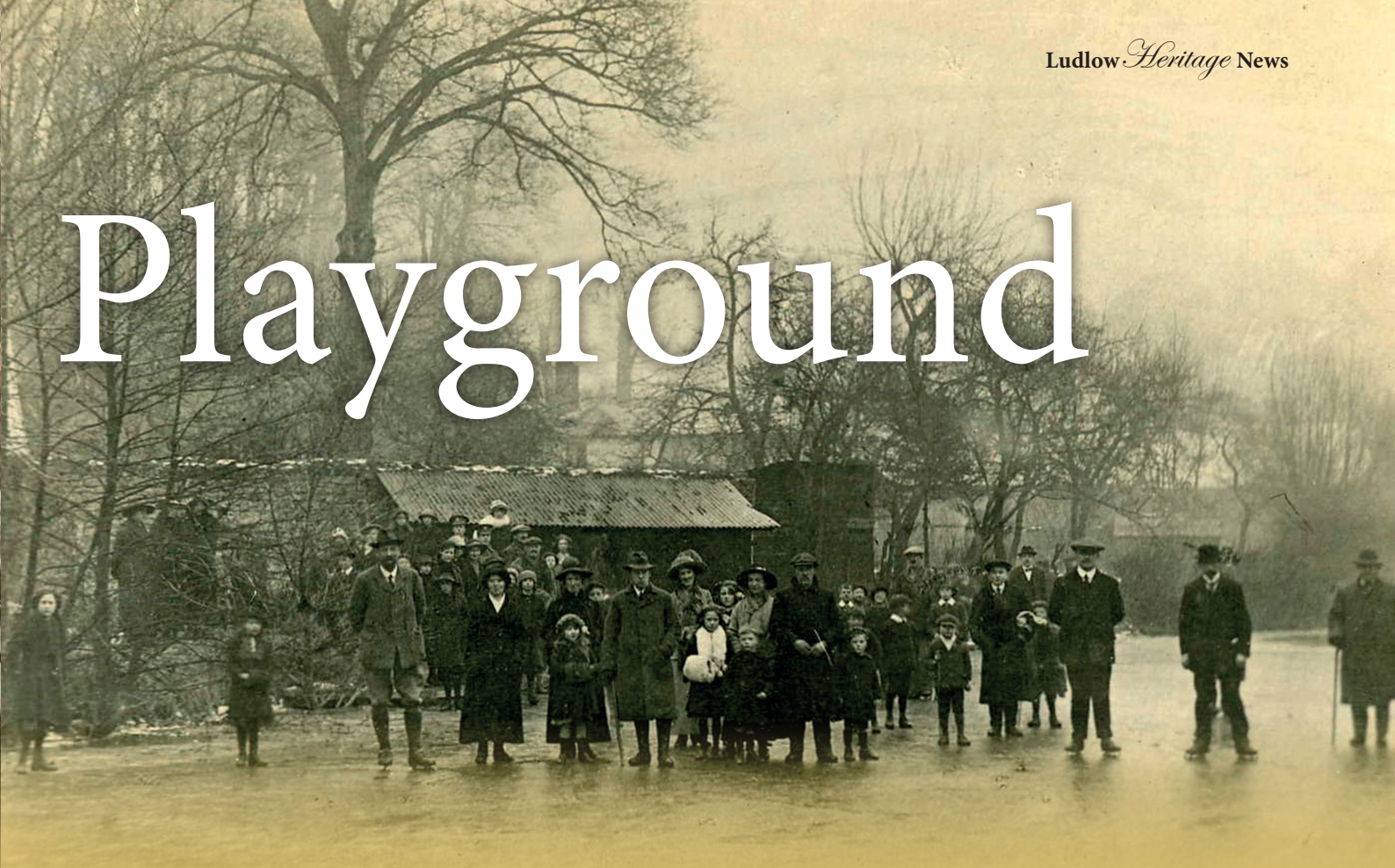
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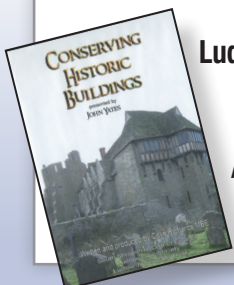
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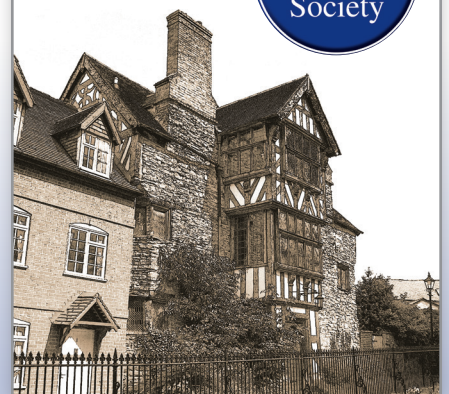
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The old sluice gates next to Dinham Weir

Eel traps return to Dinham

David Edwards

The old eel traps at the rear of the Mill on the Green at Dinham are to be restored and brought back to use. But....to SAVE the eel, not to EAT it.

Until late in the eighteenth century, River Teme eels would regularly have been taken as a perk for the Miller and later, presumably, by the men at the Chaplin Hodges Iron and Brass foundry set up on the riverside site in 1822.

Existing plates in the trap section below the sluice gates would have been made on site and, where possible, may be retained. In April, specialists from Fishtek Consulting of Devon undertook a condition survey for Severn Rivers Trust.

Happily, the latter body is doing the work on behalf of the Dinham Trustees the idea is that eels may be monitored by the Environment Agency, and plans then advanced for urgent conservation measures.

Wedded to the scheme will be appropriate signage for information and educational purposes.

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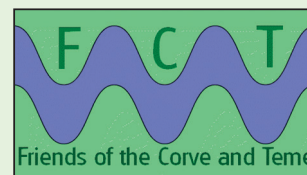
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COMMITTEE *News*

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

This summer edition also heralds the resumption of work to the Jubilee Garden and the hoped-for production of 'green shoots', a transition from a Somme theme park to a haven of tranquillity. Our Treasurer, Alan Layng, is always seeking donations and grants to complete this long haul project! Progress, too, in our campaign for more coherent, efficient and aesthetically-pleasing street lighting.

A meeting with the Council and local councillors at the end of January has given us a plan, timetable and grounds for optimism. This is going hand in hand with a campaign to reduce and rationalise street furniture and signs. Work on this is being admirably led by John Farley and Roy Thwaite.

Further pleasing news is the growth of the Society, promoted by our Membership Secretary, Jane Hunt. Whilst all committee members are to be congratulated on their backroom work, it being invidious to single out names, I shall do just that and thank our

Secretary, Juliet Diamond, for relentlessly keeping me on track. This edition, admirably compiled as ever by Stanton Stephens and corrected (I hope) by the red pen of Valerie Thomas, can be viewed as the second part of the Winter issue with its central theme of the Teme. In the words of the writer Emma Smith, 'Life is like a river: sometimes it sweeps you gently along and sometimes the rapids come out of nowhere.'

At this particular time, the rapids come in the form of the Business Rate changes due to be implemented in April. This creates winners and losers in all parts of the

country, but in Ludlow the impact is likely to be devastating, with the town's total rate bill rising by 37%. Sadly, that's not all, as the changes to individual bills seem to have been made in Wolverhampton by rate assessors who have made no visit to the town, resulting in arbitrary and absurd valuations. This means that some businesses in the historic centre are facing rate rises of between 50%-75%.

Already, around eleven businesses have announced that they are likely to move or close, including some iconic shops. This change will spell the end of Ludlow as a centre for small local outlets, the unique atmosphere will go and we will simply become a medieval Croydon, filled with chain stores. This is not just a problem for shopkeepers. An assault on them is an assault on Ludlow and I do urge

all our members to get behind any initiative to fight this iniquitous and destructive process.

Finally, concern has been expressed recently at the treatment of some of the Georgian houses in the town. To enable new and existing owners to get the best possible advice on the renovation or maintenance of their houses we are endorsing signposts to different aspects of Georgian best practice circulated at the request of the Conservation Officer for South Shropshire, Ben Williscroft. This initiative is also endorsed by the Ludlow Conservation Area Advisory Committee. Meanwhile, anyone wanting advice on, for instance, the treatment of front doors, windows or glass can go directly to the websites of the Georgian Group or the SPAB.

Richard Hurlock

TALKS AND EVENTS

Once again, a big thank you to all those members who attended the varied talks and events which took place in our last season.

Our move to the Methodist Church has proved very popular indeed. So far we have four speakers booked for the 2017/18 season. These include Emma Stuart (senior curator

of manuscripts and books at the Royal Archive), Edd Bennis who will talk on the architect, Humphrey Repton, Dorothy Nicolle who will talk on Thomas Telford and his Shropshire legacy,

and Deborah Moggach (author of The Best Exotic Marigold hotel). Dates will be confirmed at a later date and will be sent out with the Summer mailing. Or take a look at our website. Juliet Diamond is organising another of her popular outings on Saturday 17th June

to Perrycroft, a stunning house by the Arts and Crafts architect C.F.A. Voysey over the border in Herefordshire. The closing date for bookings is 28th April. For further information please contact Juliet Diamond on 01584 874481.



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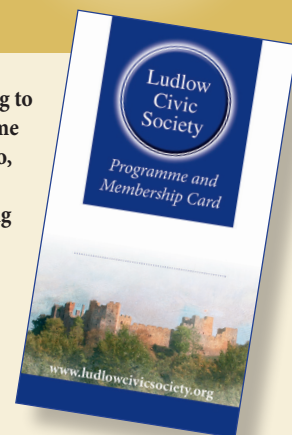




LUDLOW CIVIC SOCIETY

MEMBERSHIP

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The membership year 2016/17 is proving to be one of the best for new members, some of whom are newcomers to Ludlow. Also, many long-standing residents who have learnt of our current activities, including the Wednesday talks and summer excursions, have become new members.

The Methodist church is proving a popular venue for our talks with its excellent facilities for audiovisual presentations and welcoming atmosphere. We are very grateful to the Church for everything that is available there.

The mass emailing of members, giving advance publicity and reminders of the Wednesday talks and the excursions has benefits all round. Numbers for the talks seem to have risen this year, and, of course, we welcome non-members and members alike. This past year members will also have received emails giving publicity about the talks of other associations in the town, for example from the Friends of the Museum.

The Committee recommend to you the website www.ludlowcivicsociety.org which is frequently updated and which contains interesting news about the Society as well as the programme of talks. These will continue to start at 7 pm and please note that the AGM on 10th May will also be at the Methodist Church.

Jane Hunt

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Here are six good reasons why you should join Ludlow Civic Society

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3. We need your ideas on how we can promote improvements for the town.
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