

Before the War

The 1911 census revealed Rhuddlan to be a Flintshire town and parish of around 4,000 acres under the administration of the Parish Council and St Asaph Rural District Council and included outlying farms such as Criccin and Cwybr Fawr, parts of the Bodrhyddan and Pengwern estates and Rhuddlan Marsh.

The population is difficult to define, there being 1,607 civil parishioners, 1,344 ecclesiastical parishioners and 1,129 in the Parliamentary borough, but including 186 girls and 197 boys, the average number of children in a family being four. Around half the population spoke English, half were bilingual and 49 spoke Welsh only. Occupations varied widely and included: labourers/farm workers (134), domestic servants (82), foundry workers (64), farmers (47), gardeners (23), shop keepers (22), dressmakers (22), brick workers (17) and teachers (12). 41 people lived on private means and only 27 were retired. Eight railway workers, a dentist, a policeman, a coachbuilder, three postmen and three blacksmiths dwelt in the town.

Although most women worked as domestic servants, many were employed in family businesses assisting their husbands or running their own business such as confectionery or millinery. There was a postmistress but professional women were few in number and involved in nursing or teaching.



Rhuddlan High Street, pre-war

The religious needs of the community were met by St Mary's Church (Anglican), the Baptist Chapel (now a private house in Princes Road), Ebeneser Calvinistic Methodist Chapel (in Parliament Street), Gosen Independent Congregational Chapel (on Rhyl Road, now the Evangelical Church), Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Gwindy Street and the Roman Catholic Church whose members met in the "Tin Shed" (a corrugated iron building which stood in the car park of the current Community Centre).

As the largest buildings in the town, the churches and their halls were centres of social life too, holding regular singing festivals and eisteddfodau, guest lectures, political speeches from all parties during elections (no television campaigns in those days, candidates had to address their constituents face to face), tea parties and sport competitions.

For thirsty residents, John and Harriet Oldfield provided refreshment at the King's Head as did Thomas and Clara Davies at the New Inn. The Mariners Arms, the only free house in Rhuddlan High Street at that time (now a takeaway), was hosted by Thomas and Mary Roach. The Marsh in Station Road ran by Richard and Margaret Jones (demolished in July 2014) and the Castle Inn, still trading in Castle Street, was run by Richard and Jane Williams. Meanwhile, parched politicians could wet their whistles at the Conservative Club.



The Castle Inn in Castle Street

Sporting life thrived. There was an active rifle shooting club with an outdoor range in the grounds of Rhuddlan Castle and an indoor range in the Odyn, a community building in Princes Road, under the tutelage of Mr Gregory. The football team beat Ruthin 2-0 in the semi-final of the Prestatyn and District League Cup in February 1914 and summer days passed gently on the Cricket Club pitch (on the edge of the current golf course) or at the Tennis Club where Miss Roberts of Abbey Road was elected Hon. Secretary in June 1914. Angling was popular but falling numbers of fish in the Clwyd were causing concern – in 1890, 4300 salmon and sea trout had been caught by fishing net plus 200 by rod and line but by 1913 these numbers had dropped to 75 and 106 respectively. The netters complained that the decline was due to tar from the roads, sewage and dredging of the Foryd and the matter was referred to the Board of Agriculture and eventually netting was banned between Rhuddlan and the Foryd railway bridges in February 1914.

Postal services to Rhuddlan were not always reliable as mail arriving at Ruthin was transferred to a four-wheeled horse drawn van which left at 8pm to take a treacherous (especially in winter) mountain route to Flint from where it left by train, this process being reversed in the morning. In 1913 a motor postal van was introduced to take post from Ruthin to Denbigh, St Asaph, Rhuddlan and Rhyl. The same year the General Post Office (GPO) erected new telegraph poles along Church Street, Election Row (Princes Road) and Hylas Lane, giving better connections for trunk calls and nine new telephones had been allocated to Rhuddlan that year.



Another view of the pre-war High Street

Rhuddlan Parish Council met monthly and in 1914 was chaired by Mr Blinston the butcher, with Mr H Barnett the builder as Clerk and Assistant Overseer remunerated at £80 p.a., and Treasurer Joshua Davies. A recurring theme was the unsatisfactory state of the stone covered, pot-holed roads rutted by carts, with requests to tar Election Row, Parliament Street, Castle Street and Church Street. There was a conflict between tarring of Rhuddlan bridge which helped vehicular traffic but caused slipping of horses which required a rougher stony surface. Pre-war, ridden horses and horse-drawn vehicles were still common. Under the Lighting and Watching Act the Council was responsible for maintaining street lamps and appointing the lamplighter as there was no electric lighting. The dumping of refuse by the railway, river and in Vicarage Lane was also an issue, as unlike Dyserth there was no refuse collection, although it was pointed out that Rhuddlan was more fortunate in having a sewage system. The thorny problem of Bodelwyddan estate fencing off a portion of Rhuddlan marsh, which was believed to be illegal, prompted the Council to seek the opinion of the Marsh Trustees and they had sufficient frustration in obtaining important documents of an unknown nature from the Vicar to have it reported in the local newspapers!



Horsedrawn Transport on Rhuddlan bridge

Rhuddlan folk had a keen interest in politics with an active Conservative club and a Union and Tariff Reform Women's Association which was strongly in favour of tariffs to be levied on imported goods to protect British jobs and Preference in Trade within the Empire, as opposed to Free Trade promoted by the Liberal government. The Liberal party who were in power had strong support in North Wales, particularly among the Non-Conformist chapel attendees. The introduction of old age pensions in 1910 after Chancellor Lloyd George's "People's Budget" of 1909 and the promised provision for widows and orphans, funded from taxation of the wealthier, aroused strong feelings on both sides of politics. However, in 1913 the main issue on which the local Parliamentary by-election was fought was the future of the Anglican Church in Wales. The Church Bill proposed by the Liberal government to wrest control of the Anglican Church in Wales from the province of Canterbury, of which it was part, and make The Church in Wales an independent member in its own right proved highly divisive. Disestablishment removed the special legal status of the Anglican Church in Wales and with it the right to receive tithes which everyone was obliged to pay regardless of whether they followed the Anglican Church, or were devotees of Non-Conformism or no church at all. Disendowment of some church assets and properties meant these would be given to the University of Wales or local authorities. Mr J Hamlet Roberts, the Unionist (Conservative) candidate spoke against the Bill to a packed audience in the Calvinist Methodist Ebeneser lecture room, supported by the Bishop of St David's. Mr Thomas Henry Parry, the Liberal candidate was elected with a majority of 211 votes. As it happened, because of WW1, the 1914 Welsh Church Act was not introduced until March 31st 1920 when the Church in Wales became an independent province of the Anglican Communion, divided into six diocese led by the Archbishop of Wales.

Adult intellectual life thrived in the chapels, for example in February 1913 the Wesleyan Literary and Debating Society heard papers read by Miss Griffiths of Shop Isa on "Romance of the book of the Father", Mr Joe Roberts of Parliament Street on "The Value of Prayer to Life" and Mr Ernest Roberts of Central Stores on "The Service of Sunday Schools to the Nation". Proud of its long history, the town was delighted when the ancient Criccin Cross was restored by Mr J O Hughes, agent and joiner of Bodrhyddan estate and volunteer Fire Chief, while the discovery among Bodrhyddan estate papers and subsequent restoration of the original Statute of Rhuddlan of Edward 1st, dated 8th September 1284 along with a 14th century mise (skin) book listing burgesses and recording payments to the King, caused great interest in July 1914.

Not all residents of Rhuddlan were content with their lot, several sought a new life in the Empire. In 1913 Robert Twist and Thomas Davies from Church Street, Charles Walter Jones and George Wynne of Cross Street, and R T Williams and John Evans of Parliament Street sailed out of Liverpool in the emigration boom to Canada on *SS Teutonic*. Mrs Edwards of Burgedin House in Parliament Street, also onboard, took her two children and her two sisters, the Misses Morgan of High Street, to join her husband. Mrs Hughes of Penlon travelled with her four children alongside to join her husband-all arriving 26th April 1913.

For those who remained at home life was not easy, wages were poor, national labour strikes were common, there was no sick pay and no widow's pension. Life expectancy was 49 for men and 53 for women. The National Health Service was not created until 1948 and the antibiotics which were to improve life expectancy dramatically did not come into use until the 1940s. Epidemics of diphtheria, whooping cough, measles and chicken pox were common and sometimes fatal. Many Rhuddlan houses were overcrowded with no bathroom, and lavatories were in a small shed at the end of the garden and those situated near the river were subject to flooding on occasion.