

CAERNARFON

- The town as it is today

The town walls and castle at Caernarfon are designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Their worldwide historical and architectural significance is thus recognised and celebrated. The walls still contain the streets and plots that were laid out at the time of the town's foundation. They, too, need to be seen for their importance, for both town and castle were combined together as one entity. The defences and gates of the walled town put up after the Welsh attack of 1295 are well-preserved too, and for much of the circuit maintain their original heights and appearance.¹⁰⁹ Vehicular traffic still runs through the eastern gate. Indeed, looking through the Exchequer Gate down High Street, it is possible to gain some impression of the view that confronted those who entered the walled town seven hundred years ago. True, the building façades along the streets are now largely nineteenth or twentieth century date, but the rhythm of streets and plot frontages relates to the visual sense of the town's original layout.¹¹⁰ What is striking is the clear view provided from one end of the town right through to the other, along High Street to the Golden Gate opposite. From its main entrance gateway it is (and was) possible for the visitor to immediately take in the size of the whole town, but there is no sight of the castle, which remains hidden to the left, and only comes clearly into view after turning into Castle Street from High Street. The castle then, which certainly dominates the town's skyline, does not loom quite so large within the actual confines of the town walls.

Despite the well-preserved architectural remains of the town's walls and castle, and the fossilised plan of streets and street-blocks, there are areas within the walled town that were redeveloped in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This caused some plot boundaries to be lost, especially in Shire Hall Street and Church Street. Victorian terraces replaced earlier buildings, and in recent archaeological excavations the effect of this has been plain to see, with little trace of medieval levels surviving below ground. This was the case for the area redeveloped for the Shire Hall in the 1980s. Elsewhere in the town excavation has revealed fragmentary foundations of medieval buildings, but overall the potential looks disappointing.¹¹¹ This is in contrast to outside the town wall, where the remains of the bridge into the town was well-preserved beneath the modern street, and probably the same would be true of the area of the quay should that be fully investigated sometime in the future.¹¹² As in Edward's time, the walled town today still serves commercial, judicial and administrative functions, but the main focus of the modern town now lies outside the medieval town walls. The population of the built-up area of Caernarfon in 2001 stood at nearly 10,000.¹¹³ In 1300 Caernarfon was small compared to its neighbouring castle-towns of Conwy and Beaumaris. Now the reverse is true.

¹⁰⁹ For more on the castle and walls, see RCAMWM, *Caernarvonshire*, ii, pp.124-156; see also www.coflein.gov.uk

¹¹⁰ RCAHMW, *Caernarvonshire*, ii, pp.156-58

¹¹¹ Excavations: D.M.T. Longley, 'Rescue excavations at 29 High Street, Caernarfon, Gwynedd', *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society* 61 (2000), pp.41-53; Anon., 11-13 High Street, Caernarfon, archaeological evaluation (Gwynedd Archaeological Trust report 118, c.1994); Anon., Excavations at 29 High Street, Caernarfon, interim report 77 (G1122) (Gwynedd Archaeological Trust report, c.1993); A. Davidson, Boundary wall at 9 Market Street, Caernarfon, archaeological assessment (G1685) (Gwynedd Archaeological Trust report 409, 2001).

¹¹² See Anon., Caernarfon Bank Quay watching brief September 1994 (G1239) March 1996 (G1398) (Gwynedd Archaeological Trust report 205, nd.).

¹¹³ 2001 census covering the wards of Peblig, Seiont, Menai and Cadnant that make up the town.