FLINT

- Design and plan of the town

With its very regular layout, Flint has long been held up as an example *par excellence* of a medieval new town.[216] The town consists of six longitudinal streets in parallel, all of which are almost perfectly straight, with one, Church Street/Castle Street, wider than the others. Running across these streets at ninety degrees, and placed not quite halfway along them, is one single street, the main Chester-Holywell road. On either side of Church Street/Castle Street, this cross-street broadens out to form two adjoining squares. Here John Speed's map of 1610 shows there to be a town hall, or guild hall, and what appears to be stocks and gallows opposite. The two squares presumably represent the site of the town's market that was proclaimed by Guncelin and Howel in February 1278.[217] The castle is situated at the opposite end of the town to the church of St Mary, with the market in between.[218] This is a common arrangement for new towns of the middle ages. Encompassing the whole town, and set out in a near-perfect rectangular shape, were the defences, again shown by Speed's map, and subsequently preserved in outline by the later street-pattern of Nailor's Row and Duke Street. The town's defences linked with the castle moat, though perhaps not in the rather curious way that Speed suggests.[219] However, his depiction of the town defences as a double bank and ditch is evidently accurate, and the parallel between the arrangement of Flint's and Rhuddlan's earthwork defences has been noted.[220] Considering this stylistic similarity, and the supporting documentary evidence that work on the ditches at Flint began in the summer of 1277 (as at Rhuddlan), it would seem that this circuit originates from Flint's very beginning. This has implications for interpreting when the streets and plots within these defences were laid out.

If the town's rectangular-shaped defences were being dug from the start, it would seem likely that their contents, the layout of the town's plan, was also conceived at the same time. Gaps in the circuit necessary for streets to pass through would have to have been decided upon at this early stage, so it follows that the street-plan itself was decided upon then too, at least the two main axial streets that form a cross-shape. The presence of actual gates at these points is not attested, but would seem likely, and perhaps some of the timber known to be being used for construction at Flint in August 1277 was to provide not just a surrounding palisade but also appropriately-positioned gateways.[221] There are other more subtle signs that the town's street pattern was laid out early on. The alignment of Church Street, the main longitudinal street, is not placed in the middle of the rectangle formed by the town's defences but is instead offset slightly to the north. This means that Church Street is not aligned on the town's central axis. In fact, no street is. Rather, the central axis of the town is formed by an imagined line drawn from the centre of the circular donjon of

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[216] Eg. T.F. Tout, Mediaeval Town Planning, a lecture (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1934), p.18; Beresford. New Towns, p.39. Often wrongly called a 'Welsh bastide': A.E.J. Morris, History of Urban Form (Longman, Harlow, 1979), p.103.
[217] CWR, p.165.
[218] The church is mentioned in the 1291 Taxatio as a chapelry of Northrop parish. See RCAHMW, Flint, p.28.
[219] See J.G. Edwards, 'Building of Flint', figure 2; also O.E. Craster, 'The supposed outer ditch of Flint castle', Journal of the Flintshire Historical Society 22 (1965-6), p.71; RCAHMW, Flint, p.29.
[220] Taylor, Welsh Castles, p.18; H. Quinnell, M.R. Blockley and P. Berridge, Excavations at Rhuddlan, Clwyd 1969-73, Mesolithic to Medieval, CBA Research Report 95 (1994), Excavations, pp.219-20; see also Medieval Archaeology 16 (1971), p.192.
[221] See Taylor, Welsh Castles, pp.18-19.

the castle at one end of the town through to the church of St Mary's at the other. The overall symmetry of the town-plan, with three streets on either side of this central axis, therefore seems to have been thought out not only in relation to the rectangular outline of the town's defensive circuit but also with regard to the placing of the donjon and church. [222] Castle and town are thus conceived was one single design, set out on the ground along a common axis which existed only in the mind of the designer who wished to produce a symmetrical plan. Their thinking is accessible today through 'reverse-engineering' from the surviving features that formed the town, and suggests that both town and castle were planned out together as a whole at the same time. If so, who might have been responsible?

As with Rhuddlan, there are a number of individuals involved on the ground at Flint in 1277-8 who could have designed and laid out both the town and castle. The early date of the work carried on the site, as far as the castle and town ditches were concerned, would suggest the design was decided perhaps in July or August 1277, at least in its overall layout. This matter of timing would place perhaps William of Perton as an influence, rather than Nicholas Bonel. But if it was Perton (who was also responsible for overseeing work at Rhuddlan), why is it that the plans of the two towns are so different in layout? The suggestion has also been made that Edward himself was influential, perhaps having taken inspiration from Aigues-Mortes, from where he departed for the Crusades in 1270, a royal-founded new town likewise rectangular in its overall form, though that's where their similarities in plan end.[223] The Tour de Constance at Aigues-Mortes has also been used to explain the 'one of the most puzzling features of any of the Welsh castles', the cylindrical donjon at Flint, itself offset from the keep.[224] The street-plan at Flint is quite distinctive, however. It is not matched in plan by any of Edward's other new towns in Wales, with the exception perhaps of Holt, also close to the English border. It is also orthogonal in layout, a form rarely encountered elsewhere in new towns of the thirteenth century in England and Wales, even when compared to cases such as Winchelsea and New Salisbury.[225]

No doubt Edward was involved to some degree in the planning of Flint – he was close at hand at nearby Rhuddlan during August – but whether he had a direct hand in urban design seems unlikely. The task was one more suited to one of his clerks or someone overseeing the works. In this regard, especially considering his early presence at Flint and involvement in digging work, including the town's defences, Master William of March is a possible candidate. He was there in August leading diggers on the ground, and presumably had experience in matters of working out how to make earthworks, in this case to encompass a new town. Unlike Perton, he does not appear to have been involved at Rhuddlan, where similar work was going on, which may explain the differences in layout between these two neighbouring and contemporary new towns. Later, in 1280, he became cofferer in the king's household, and then rose up to become keeper of the wardrobe.[226] But if the plan was developed by March, why was it that the double-bank-and-ditch defences at

[222] A chapel at Flint is first recorded in 1291, while work on the Great Tower of the castle is attested by 1281. Taylor, Welsh Castles, p.21, also see p.25, note 4. Their positions were presumably planned for from the start.
[223] Beresford, New Towns, p.40; A. Lauret, R, Malebranche and G. Séraphin, Bastides. Villes nouvelles du moyen-age (Éditions Milan, Toulouse, 1988), pp.178-181. Aigues-Mortes was founded as a royal town in the 1240s.
[224] Prestwich, Edward I, p.211. On the donjon see also Taylor, Welsh Castles, p.25, note 4; D.J.C. King, 'The donjon of Flint', Journal of the Chester and North Wales Architectural, Archaeological and Historical Society 45 (1958), pp.61-9.
[225] Two other new towns often compared to Flint, see Tout, Mediaeval Town Planning.
[226] Tout, Chapters in Administrative History, ii, pp.13, 21.

Flint were also present at Rhuddlan? Why, too, were the two towns orientated on the same alignment? Such similarities may point to a common hand at Flint and Rhuddlan, with perhaps two 'experts' on site, one a ditch-maker and the other a town planner/surveyor. There were, of course, numerous men around at Flint in July and August 1277, for this was a mustering post for the king's forces, a 'camp' occupied by miscellaneous workers, overseen by knights such as Peter of Brampton and others. So disentangling one individual from so many, at this crucial time, is perhaps not altogether feasible, and the exact author or authors of the design at Flint will remain tantalisingly hidden.

That the town was ready and finished by February 1278 is evident from the proclamation of the market there, as well as the appointment of Guncelin and Howel, together with Nicholas Bonel, to assess burgages. The proclamation must post-date the market place, and since the market place is integral to the town's plan they must both *pre*-date it. The plots that formed burgages similarly may have already been set out in between the longitudinal streets that they fronted. No standard burgage size is recorded for Flint, and measurement of plot-frontages in 2004 failed to reveal the dimensions of the original plots.[227] Unlike the plots at Rhuddlan, those at Flint are much more regular and ordered in appearance, though with Flint's apparently slow development from the very start it might be expected that plot boundaries were changed, not least after the burning of the town in 1294-5. Again, this is a curious anomaly. The widths of the street-blocks probably determined the depths of the plots, and these are fairly consistent, ranging between 100 and 125 feet in the western part of the town (30m-38m).[228] The long narrow street-blocks containing the plots in effect provided each with two street-frontages and this would have helped enable burgesses to sub-divide their burgages, a lucrative proposition since they could then more easily rent out parts of their property. Whoever came up with this renumerative design presumably had their eye not only on the aesthetics of the town's symmetry but also on how best to make a town economically attractive. Such a person may well have been financially astute, someone with accounting skills, William of March perhaps?

The plan of Flint is often alikened to the bastides of south-west France, and parallels are drawn between Edward's new towns of Gascony and north Wales.[229] The connections that some of the king's clerks in Wales, such as William Louth and William March, had with Gascony have been used to support these comparisons.[230] In its details however, the layout of Flint looks unlike even the contemporary 'English' bastides of Monpazier, Molières, and Beaumont du Périgord of the Agenais in Dordogne.[231] As with Aigues-Mortes, similarities are only superficial, the towns generally having overall rectangular forms, and in some cases parallel series of longitudinal streets.[232] Flint provides some insight, however, into the process of medieval urban design, for its plan seems to have been carefully worked out first, perhaps even drawn on parchment, and then accurately and precisely laid out on the ground. This must have required some expertise, perhaps even practical knowledge of how to use and apply geometry. One curious item of expenditure was incurred early on in the work in summer 1277. This concerned 'tables [*tabule*] for the construction of the castle', which Arnold Taylor suggests were for 'the setting out of the positions of the castle walls

[227] The survey data is accessible via 'Data downloads'.
[228] Some of the streets have been lost due to redevelopment making field-measurement difficult.
[229] Tout, Mediaeval Town Planning, p.18; Beresford, New Towns, p.40.
[230] Tout, Chapters in Administrative History, ii, pp.64-7.
[231] For plans of these places see Lauret et al, Bastides, pp.66-7, 283.
[232] For example, Beaumont du Périgord.

and towers'.[233] Could it be that they were a kind of plane table used in surveying angles?[234] Something must have ensured that Flint's layout was kept perfectly geometrical in shape.

[233] Taylor, Welsh Castles, p.19. Taylor notes the tables were bought mainly from archers, and suggests they were targets.
[234] On early-modern plane tables, see R.T. Gunther, Early Science in Oxford, vol. 1, Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics and Surveying (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1923), p.371. No medieval examples are known.