NEWBOROUGH

- ▪ The design and plan of the town

Newborough sits on a long ridge of high ground and its layout is orientated so as to fit it. The town comprises two main streets that intersect to form a cross shape, one of which runs along the north-east/south west axis of the ridge. To the north of this, and in parallel, is a further street, making the street pattern into a grid plan, albeit a simple one. The two parallel streets, Church Street/Pen-Dref Street and Lôn Twnti are both laid out at an angle of about ninety degrees to the intersecting street, formed by Chapel Street/Malltraeth Street. However, of the two intersections, the angle closest to a perfect right-angle is formed by the two main streets. Where they meet was the market place and also the site of the town hall, shown to be 'in ruins' on a map dating from 1738-9.[300] The two main streets were once broader in width than they are today, as is shown by the 1836 Tithe Map, and both were wider than Lôn Twnti to the north, which appears little more than a lane on nineteenth century maps.

Newborough's two main streets were straight as well as broad. Thanks to the excavations carried out at Cae Llys, it is clear that Church Street/Pen-Dref Street ran right up to the entrance gate of the *llys*, a seat of the princes of Gwynedd.[301] There, at the end of the long ridge and looking down the straight street into the town, the *llys* stood close to the church of St Peter, which itself may 'have originally been a royal chapel to the court'.[302] The town plan, then, is orientated not only to take advantage of local topography, but is also set out on an alignment that links it to the court complex, even to the extent of having the street set at a right-angle to the perimeter wall of the *llys*.[303] The new town and the royal court thus have a close relationship, as if the town was designed around the latter (the *llys* buildings certainly pre-date the town) in such a way to emphasise the visual dominance of the court, a feature also suggested by the archaeology of the site.[304] In effect, the arrangement of town and court at Newborough imitates the spatial pattern of Edward's castle-town layouts, where the towns are laid out before the castle gates. This seems to have been done deliberately and suggests some overall design for Newborough had been thought out. By the time the town was being laid out, around 1300, the court complex – or at least the manor to which it pertained – was in English hands, having been granted to the king's wife, Eleanor of Castile,[305] suggesting perhaps that this idea of using the street layout to link the court with the town was indeed based on the thinking of Edward's men, and thus akin to the castle towns they had founded elsewhere in north Wales. Written evidence of the time would seem to corroborate this, for in the account describing the amount of land at Rhosyr appropriated by the king for the new town, dating to around 1300, it was also stipulated that the prescribed area being 'granted to the old burgesses in recompense for the lands vacated by them at Llanfaes' actually excluded 'four acres taken up by the

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[300] Soulsby, Towns of Medieval Wales, p.195.

[301] See Johnstone, 'Cae Llys', pp.251-95.

[302] Johnstone, 'Cae Llys', p.252; on the church see RCAHMW, Anglesey, pp.118-19.

[303] Johnstone, 'Cae Llys', p.255.

[304] Johnstone, 'Cae Llys', p.269, notes that 'the external face of the [perimeter] wall… cut into the original ground surface in order to exaggerate the external appearance' of it, though it should also be noted here that he suggests the entrance on the east side of the walled enclosure 'appears too narrow and not sufficiently elaborate for it to have been the main entrance into the complex' (p.267).

[305] Johnstone, 'Cae Llys', p.251.

'royal roads' of the borough'.[306] These 'royal roads' may well have been laid out by the king's men as part of their work in portioning the land at Rhosyr, which would explain why Church Street aligns with the central entrance of the court complex. It would also perhaps explain a curious feature of Newborough's plan – the irregularities in its plot patterns.

The regular form of the town's street plan, with its straight wide streets and right angles, is at odds with the irregular pattern of the town's plots. The plots themselves are of varying shapes and sizes, and overall they look as if they have been squeezed into a pre-existing field pattern. The overall pattern of plots is like a Maltese cross, the wedge-shaped arms of which are formed by the ever-deeper building plots that extend back from the main street axes that radiate out from the centre of the town. The plots closest to the market place are the shallowest in depth, while those further out the deepest. Why this should be so could be because the straight streets were cut through existing field-lands. The sinuous form of the town's plot boundaries suggest this, too, and there are many cases in medieval towns where this particular shape reflects a process of laying out plots on cultivation strips or agricultural landholdings.[307] The documentary sources again help on this. In 1305, the newly arriving burgesses were seeking 'to remove the villein tenants then dwelling in their midst', that is to say those existing inhabitants of Rhosyr whose lands were being appropriated for the new borough, 'so that their burgages might be surrounded by certain metes and bounds'.[308] It seems that the agricultural tenants were being moved so that in their place the burgesses could have their plots for their burgages, and so the likelihood is that the burgages were simply set out within the former field-lands and followed the strip pattern of earlier landholdings, enclosing them and thus preserving in the plot pattern not only the lines of field boundaries but also tenancies of Rhosyr.[309] The different-sized plots that resulted from this process are probably the reason for the variations in the rents being paid by the burgesses for their *placeae* in the survey of 1352.[310]

The contrast between the town's straight regular streets and its irregular plot patterns thus tells an interesting story about Newborough's design and planning around 1300. It would appear that the streets were set out first, orientated to fit local topography but also to line up with the former Welsh *llys*. These streets cut through an existing landscape of fields and landholdings that belonged to the tenants of Rhosyr. Afterwards the plots were defined, and their boundaries fixed upon the ground. In the process of removing existing tenants to make way for the new burgesses, the patterns of their agricultural holdings were used as a basis for the burgesses' plots, hence the irregular-looking plot patterns.[311] This would be easier to do than erasing field-boundaries: simply changing the legal basis of the tenure of

[306] Lewis, Mediaeval Boroughs, p.52.

[307] See, for example, K.D. Lilley, 'Mapping the medieval city: plan analysis and urban history', Urban History 27 (2000), pp.5-30.

[308] Lewis, Mediaeval Boroughs, p.52.

[309] A study of the agricultural landholdings of Rhosyr is to be found in Hendre Bach, Newborough: archaeological assessment (Gwynedd Archaeological Trust report 461, 2002), in which the 'arable parcels' of the local open field system have been identified (p.6). Archaeological work has also identified early property boundaries along Church Street, see N. Johnstone, Church Street, Newborough: archaeological evaluation (G1382) (Gwynedd Archaeological Trust report 191, 1996), pp.1-4; R. White, unpublished letter dated October 3 1979 held by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (in Project File G1382).

[310] Carr, 'Extent of Anglesey', pp.262-72.

[311] An unpublished and undated report on Newborough and Rhosyr by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust refers to '99 long (?213 feet) and narrow (15 feet) burgages' (p.1 of typescript). Field survey of the town in 2004 revealed a wide variation in the widths and depths of plots, as indicated also by nineteenth century mapping. See 'Data downloads'.

the land (through the borough charter) rather than setting out plots on a new arrangement. Had the latter been done, the result would have been a town plan with regular plots as well as streets, as is the case with some of Edward's other new towns, at Flint and Holt for example, where the town was laid out all in one go. But instead at Newborough there were evidently two-phases in setting out the town, resulting in the differences in the forms of the streets and plots. This is comparable to the situation at Rhuddlan, where there is a similar incongruity between street and plot patterns. The work on setting out Newborough was also probably divided between the king's men and the local community, the royal agents being responsible for laying out streets, and the new burgesses (and the old tenants) for arranging the *placeae*. The latter required some negotiation which is why the burgesses brought in Prince Edward in 1305. The king's men may also have worked previously at nearby Beaumaris, but if they were the same people they clearly took a different approach at Newborough. Not only did they only lay out just streets (and not plots), they also decided to use a very different layout of streets. Indeed, in its details Newborough's design has no obvious parallels compared with Edward's other new towns in Wales, though the arrangement linking the royal court with the street plan is reminiscent of his castle-towns.