

## RHUDDLAN

- Design and plan of the town

Edward's new town extends in parallel alongside the river Clwyd, to the north-west of the castle. Its layout is evident in the surviving pattern of the town's streets and plots, and these display some interesting characteristics. The main street, High Street, is orientated north-east/south-west, while two more minor streets run across this, one running from the castle to the church (Castle Street and Church Street), and the other, to its north, running more or less parallel (Parliament Street and Gwindy Street).<sup>383</sup> The town's streets intersect at skewed angles of about 110 and 70 degrees, rather than at ninety-degrees. This gives the town an overall rhomboidal or diamond shape, a 'flattened' rectangle, similar in fact to the castle's shape.<sup>384</sup> The angle of the streets and their alignments are also reflected in the shape of the town's defences. This is particularly clear in the surviving corner-section of double-bank and ditch earthworks in the north of the town. The angle of this corner matches that of the cross-streets intersecting with High Street. The streets and the defences thus seem to correspond in plan, and this suggests that both were set out at the same time, to a single design. However, the street-blocks of the town are different in size, and contain plots that form quite irregular patterns. So overall, Rhuddlan's streets and defences have a more regular appearance than its layout of plots. This difference in form probably stems from the town's initial planning and early development.

Whether the town's defences were completed as a continuous circuit is questionable. As noted above, the archaeological and documentary evidence would suggest the town was only partially defended, with only the earthwork alignment between the river and the corner-section to the north of Gwindy Street being attested.<sup>385</sup> Through property boundaries shown on eighteenth and nineteenth century maps it is possible, however, to trace a continuation in the alignment of the ditch from this northern corner. Its route is south-eastwards across High Street, then onwards behind plots facing onto Parliament Street to meet with another excavated section of ditch at Castle Street, which appears to link with the castle's ditch.<sup>386</sup> This postulated section of town ditch would then make a complete circuit around the north of the town, with the river and castle flanking and protecting its southern side. The plots fronting Parliament Street extend back to a common 'back fence' that in places is staggered, as if at some point in the past some of these plots were extended over the line of a former ditch. A fifteenth-century survey of properties in Rhuddlan records some parts of burgages situated 'upon le Diche', as well as properties against or on 'le Paledich' and 'le Hemptendich'.<sup>387</sup> The locations of these are uncertain but they may be lost sections of town ditch. At the point where the postulated alignment would

---

<sup>383</sup> The medieval names of these streets are recorded in the fifteenth-century survey: High Street/Bridge Street equate with the modern High Street, while Pepper Street, Harding Street, Pillory Street, Castle Street relate to the two cross streets. There is also a Clwyd Bank, probably the lane south of the church, and Dog Lane, perhaps the southern end of the present Castle Street, as it usually refers to a dog-leg shape: Jones, 'Document of Rhuddlan', *passim*. The bridge over the Clwyd is described as 'newly built' in 1331-2: Flintshire Ministers' Accounts, 1328-53, p.6.

<sup>384</sup> RCAHMW, Flint, p.81: the castle 'not being a perfect parallelogram', the north-east and south-west sides 'are a few feet longer' than the north-west and south-east.

<sup>385</sup> Quinnell et al, *Excavations*, pp.84-93.

<sup>386</sup> Quinnell et al, *Excavations*, p.222; J. Manley, 'Salvage excavations at Lôn Hylas, Rhuddlan, Clwyd: ditches of the Roman and medieval periods', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 134 (1985), pp.230-35.

<sup>387</sup> Jones, 'Document of Rhuddlan', pp.63, 70, 72, 74, 81, 83, 87, 89, 90. The 'pale ditch'

have crossed High Street there is also a narrowing in the road's width, an indication of a lost gateway. The fifteenth century survey is again suggestive, for three properties are noted to be 'beyond the Barres', possibly a reference to an entrance into the defended town.<sup>388</sup> Even if the defences along this northern side of the town were never completed fully, these are perhaps signs that a ditch was set out on this alignment.<sup>389</sup>

The known and postulated ditch alignments define the area of the Edwardian town, as well as its overall shape. This area between the river, the castle and the ditch-alignments encompasses around 20½ acres (82,600m<sup>2</sup>), rather larger than the area contained within the Norman defences, but smaller than that of the earlier burh.<sup>390</sup> The record of Edward's men working at Rhuddlan's makes it possible to suggest how the town's plan was formed and laid out over 1277-8. The earliest work was on straightening the course of the river, and it looks as if the town's plan was arranged to fit this since the cross-streets and northern ditch-alignment are all set out parallel to it. The position of the castle in relation to the town also seems to be thought out and deliberate for it occupies a position the same distance from High Street as the ditch alignment is at the opposite end of the town, giving the whole town a balanced, almost symmetrical layout with High Street forming the central axis.<sup>391</sup> It seems then that the castle, streets and town-defences were conceived and laid out as a single entity, since the whole site has a unity in form. The town defences and streets were probably marked out when work on the river and castle was proceeding, during summer and autumn 1277. The town was ready for burgesses by February 1278, so the streets must have been formed by then. The design itself may have been worked out during Edward's stay at Rhuddlan, which was before castle construction began in November 1277, but after the digging of the new river channel had begun in July or August. Edward was staying there on and off in August, as well as between September and November.<sup>392</sup> This was the time that William of Perton was keeper of the works at Rhuddlan (and Flint), and Nicholas Bonel 'surveyor' of works.<sup>393</sup> Either man could have been responsible for drawing up the town plan, in consort with the king, no doubt also with some consultation with Master Bertram, the castle's mason at that time, and perhaps even with Master William of Boston who was in charge of the river straightening.

As 'surveyor' of the works, Bonel may have had the necessary skills to undertake the practical job of positioning the town's streets and defences after the plan had been decided. Later, when William of Louth was asked to survey the town, it is clear that some expertise of this sort would be required, for example in assessing existing plots and burgages, presumably with measurements taken, the details being written down in the kind of record that Master James and William of Perton were subsequently asked to produce. Equally, though, Perton's role at Rhuddlan, and his earlier work there than Bonel's, could show that he was concerned with laying out the town. Both Perton and Bonel were also involved at

---

<sup>388</sup> Jones, 'Document of Rhuddlan', pp.68, 72, 79.

<sup>389</sup> A different alignment, alongside Princes Street has been suggested: see H. Miles, 'Excavations at Rhuddlan, 1969-71: interim report', *Journal of the Flintshire Historical Society* 25 (1971-2), pp.1-8. Later excavations failed to locate a ditch here however: see Quinnell et al, *Excavations*, p.92.

<sup>390</sup> The area is calculated from field survey data gathered in 2004 (available via 'Data downloads'). For the Norman town defences and burh see Quinnell et al, *Excavations*, p.4, figure 1.2.

<sup>391</sup> The High Street was also the town's market, as is made clear in a transfer of property in the town in 1323: a messuage and land in Rhuddlan 'of which one end abutted upon the highway leading from the market... to the bridge of the same town, and the other upon the cemetery of the church of St Mary'. *Flintshire Ministers' Accounts, 1301-1328*, ed. Jones, p.xliv.

<sup>392</sup> Taylor, *Welsh Castles*, p.27, note 6.

<sup>393</sup> Taylor, *Welsh Castles*, p.19. CWR, p.160.

Flint at this time, and interestingly while the plan of the town there shows no obvious similarities to that at Rhuddlan the double-bank-and-ditch defences of the two towns do.<sup>394</sup> Either way, Master James arrives too late on the scene at Rhuddlan to have had an input on the design and planning of the new town, and likewise William of Louth, though he had been responsible, it seems, in ‘the foundation of the obscure bastide of Cassac [sic] in the Médoc’, in Gascony.<sup>395</sup> Louth’s surveying of Rhuddlan was to see what was already done there, while Bonel’s role as surveyor of works was more likely to be to mark out the ground with streets in preparation for building up burgages. That there may have been a delay between setting out the streets and laying out properties is suggested by the apparent variety in size and shape of plots within the town’s street-blocks, lacking the regular rectilinear layout evident in the street-pattern and the overall shape of the town.

In comparison to some of Edward’s other new towns in north Wales, such as Flint, Conwy and Beaumaris, Rhuddlan’s plot-patterns are unusually disordered. No standard burgage size is recorded for the town.<sup>396</sup> Instead, the documentary record hints that burgages in the town were developed gradually, over a period of a year or so, rather than simply set out in one go, and adopted and built upon by burgesses. The survey conducted by William of Louth and Guncelin of Batelesmere in March 1278 seems to show this process at work, for they were ‘to commit, assign, and to assess lands and places in Rothelan to all who desire to receive and hold the same from the king, according to their discretion’.<sup>397</sup> It may be that if the original plots had been fixed, the arriving townspeople soon adapted them to their own needs, hence the requirement for the royal administrators to keep an eye on things early on. The instruction given to Bonel in February 1278, to ‘assess’ the town’s burgages, perhaps indicates the initial stage of defining the bounds of property parcels, while subsequent surveys overseen by William of Louth, in March 1278 and July 1280, were to check on the process of their take-up by the burgesses.<sup>398</sup> Since he was having ‘to assess and rent burgages in the same plots’, the parcels were there already and what he was doing was assigning them as burgages – as legally-defined units of land tenure – to those coming to the town.<sup>399</sup> From early 1278 onwards burgesses were arriving and doubtless decided whereabouts they would like to be. In February 1278, in the earliest reference to burgages in the town, the location of one of them is arranged.<sup>400</sup> An uneven take-up of burgages would leave empty areas of the town’s street-blocks, hence the presence of ‘void plots’ that Louth was surveying in July 1280. A further indication of the protracted development of the burgages is the mention, in March 1279, of men building burgages near the castle, and then, more than a year later, another reference to burgesses ‘building the town’.<sup>401</sup> Such a gradual process would account for the variations in plots shapes and sizes at Rhuddlan.

The making of Edwardian Rhuddlan thus appears to have involved two distinct stages. The first being the design and planning of the town’s overall layout of streets and defences, tied into the castle building work and the digging of the new river alignment. This must have

---

<sup>394</sup> See Flint.

<sup>395</sup> Tout, *Charters in Administrative History*, ii, pp.64-5. The place is probably Cubzac, see Beresford, *New Towns*, pp.595-6; Lauret et al, *Bastides*, p.289.

<sup>396</sup> Also no obvious plot size emerged from the field-survey carried out in the town in 2004. See ‘Data downloads’.

<sup>397</sup> CPR 1272-81, p.366.

<sup>398</sup> CWR, p.165; CPR 1272-81, p.366; CWR, p.178.

<sup>399</sup> CWR, p.178.

<sup>400</sup> CPR, p.259. This is suggested by the wording: ‘provided that the burgage granted to ... Richard be situated between the burgages granted to his sons’.

<sup>401</sup> CWR, pp.180, 188.

been begun and completed by the end of 1277. The second stage involved the development of burgages within the street-blocks, probably using pre-defined property parcels as a basis but gradually obscuring the arrangement of these as the plots were acquired by burgesses and built up during 1278-80. This second stage could have seen some parts of the town more favoured by burgesses than others. That some parts were not developed at this time is indicated by archaeological work carried out just north of Gwindy Street, within the postulated line of the defences, where limited traces of medieval occupation were revealed and no buildings, even close to the street frontage.<sup>402</sup> Through the documentary record the individuals involved in these two stages are identifiable, but as always it is very difficult to name exactly who was doing what. It may be that the design, planning and development of the town was more a process of discussion and negotiation between the various individuals involved, each drawing upon their specialisms to get the job done, whether administrators, master craftsmen, or merchants.

---

<sup>402</sup> D. Thomas, Gwindy Street, Rhuddlan, Clwyd. Archaeological Evaluation. Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust Report 77 (1993), p.10.