

# Archaeological assessment of Ruyton XI Towns, Shropshire

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with contributions by Derek Hurst, Richard Morriss, Elizabeth Pearson and Paul Stamper

## Summary

*The historic town of Ruyton-XI-Towns was surveyed during the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey, a desk-based study of 64 smaller historic town in Shropshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Archaeological and documentary evidence relating to the historic core of Ruyton was carefully analysed, comprising topographic data, published and unpublished archaeological reports, museum collections, primary and secondary historical sources, historical maps, and field data recorded by the project team.*

*Detailed evidence is provided on the character and layout of the settlement in the medieval period. The available information is analysed and mapped in detail, and a model of the development of the town is proposed. In addition, the evidence for pre-urban occupation is considered, together with evidence of the post-medieval settlement. All archaeologically-relevant information has been recorded as part of the county Sites and Monuments Record. Specialist assessments of artefacts, ecofacts, standing buildings and documentary sources are included. A detailed archaeological research framework has been developed for Ruyton, which will inform future archaeological investigations as well as management decisions.*

*The historic core of Ruyton contains buried archaeological deposits, and these are judged to have moderate potential. In addition there is moderate potential for the recovery of artefact assemblages, and low to moderate potential for the recovery of ecofact assemblages. However, these assemblages may need to be revised once archaeological deposits have been investigated with modern fieldwork approaches. The historic buildings do not constitute an extensive complementary body of evidence, and are judged to have low potential for detailed study and recording. The surviving documentary sources are extensive and consequently the potential for further study is high.*

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Location and landuse

The urban area of Ruyton-XI-Towns is located at NGR SJ 394 221 in Oswestry District. The present settlement is a village centred on the church and castle.

### 1.2 Topography, geology and soils

Ruyton-XI-Towns lies at a height of between 75m and 100m OD. The castle and church are situated on higher ground at the edge of the valley of the River Perry. Here the soils are well drained typical brown sands of the Bridgnorth association overlying Permo-Triassic and Carboniferous Sandstone. The planned medieval town spreads to the west on the lower ground close to the river and the soils here are well drained typical brown earths of the Ellerbeck association over glacio-fluvial drift (Soil Survey of England and Wales, Ragg *et*

al 1984) (British Geological Survey 1:250,000, sheet 52°N-O.4°W).

### 1.3 Chronological outline

A vill of Ruyton is recorded in the Domesday Book (Beresford 1988). In the 12th century the Anglo-Saxon manors of Ruyton, Wikey and Felton became part of the larger lordship of Ruyton-XI-Towns (Sylvester 1969). The castle at the township of Ruyton was almost certainly built before 1148, but it was destroyed by the Welsh in 1212 and may still have been derelict in 1302 when it was bought by Edmund, Earl of Arundel. The castle was in repair by 1357, but it is last mentioned in 1364.

The Earl of Arundel founded a borough in 1308 when a borough charter was granted (Beresford and Finberg 1973; Millward and Robinson 1978). A document dated to between 1304 and 1310 mentions seven burgesses in the *nova villa* of Ruyton (Eyton 1860), and in 1311 the borough charter was followed by the grant of a charter to hold a Wednesday market and an annual fair lasting three days (Millward and Robinson 1978). The new planned borough was laid out on land taken out of the township of Ruyton (Kenyon 1901b, 213), and separate courts were held for the "Newtown of Ruyton" and for the manor of Ruyton (Kenyon 1901a). The borough stretched from the present Church of England school, at the north end of Church Road, to the western edge of the castle (Kenyon 1901b). The castle, church and tenement plots to the east of this were still legally part of the manor of "Old" Ruyton (Kenyon 1901b).

Brewing seems to have been a major medieval trade and the burgesses were empowered to prevent anyone from brewing without their consent both in the borough and the manor of Ruyton (Kenyon 1891). Documentary evidence suggests that mills and *viviaries*, or fishponds, were also important to the local economy (Eyton 1860) and two of these close to the town were still marked on the 1838 tithe map (SA 5181, SA 5183).

During the 14th century the borough had grown into a small country town but in 1400 it was sacked by Owen Glyndwr (Kenyon 1891) and for several years at the beginning of the 15th century Ruyton became part of the Welsh principedom of Powys (Millward and Robinson 1978). In 1407 it lost its market to Oswestry and declined to become a large village (Sylvester 1969). Despite the fact that Ruyton had no urban function after the middle ages the borough charter was only formally revoked in 1886 and burgesses and town officials continue to be mentioned in the town records (Kenyon 1891, 237; Brown 1988). Between 1536 and 1543 the Acts Of Union brought Wales under English law and the Lordship of Ruyton became part of Shropshire (Brown 1988, 25)

The settlement continued into the modern period but became a large village. Local industries in the post-medieval period included glass manufacture, tanning and hemp and linen weaving. By the mid 19th century, however, the local industries had failed and the settlement declined (Millward and Robinson 1978).

### 1.4 Placename studies

In the Domesday Survey the manor of Ruyton is called *Ruitone* (Thorn and Thorn 1986). This is derived from Old English and means "Rye Farm" (Gelling 1990, 256). The larger manor of *Ruyton XI Towns*, named after the eleven townships within the manor, is first mentioned in the Welsh pedigrees during the reign of King Stephen in the first half of the 12th century (Kenyon 1901a, 33). In 1304-10 the borough is referred to as the *nova villa* of Ruyton (Beresford 1988).

### 1.5 Syntheses of documentary and archaeological data

The documentary evidence relating to Ruyton-XI-Towns was first summarised by Eyton (1860), but important works of synthesis were undertaken by Kenyon around the turn of the century (Kenyon 1891; 1896; 1900; 1901a; 1901b). A popular history, incorporating

the work of Kenyon and that of a 19th century local historian James Cooper, was published in 1988 (Brown 1988). There has been no synthesis of the archaeological data from the town. The present assessment was carried out by the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey in 1993. The text was revised in March 1995 to incorporate the results of fieldwork undertaken by the Survey (see section 1.7). No information published after December 1994 has been incorporated into this assessment.

## **1.6 Cartographic sources**

Roque's 1752 map of Shropshire, the tithe Map of 1838 (Foxall nd) and the Ordnance Survey first edition 1:2500 maps (*Shropshire sheet XXV.2* (1882)) have been used to aid in the identification of remains and the definition of components.

## **1.7 Archaeological excavations and surveys**

The only recorded excavation to have been undertaken at Ruyton XI Towns was carried out in 1879 by the Vicar of St John's, when the remains of the 4-5m thick bailey wall were uncovered underneath the present churchyard wall (SA 1123; Kenyon 1901a). The 19th century local historian James Cooper also carried out some fieldwork in and around the town and identified a glass manufacturing site (SA 2516) and a tanyard (SA 6274). However the exact location of these sites is unknown. More recently a reliquary to St Thecla was discovered within a burgage plot close to the church and castle (SA 5180; Stokes 1991).

Fieldwork was undertaken by the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey in November 1994. This identified remains, investigated and revised the extent of components, and recorded 18th and 19th century cellarge and modern developments in the urban area.

## **1.8 Acknowledgments and personnel**

Survey fieldwork was undertaken by Victoria Buteux and Laura Templeton. Analysis and report writing were carried out by Victoria Buteux, and the report was edited by Hal Dalwood.

# **2 Pre-urban evidence**

There is aerial photographic and artefactual evidence of human activity in the modern parish of Ruyton-XI-Towns from at least the Bronze Age, but there is as yet no archaeological evidence of a settlement on the site of the medieval town before the 11th century. The location of the Domesday vill has not yet been identified but it is possible that it was under or close to the site of the later castle. A rural settlement would have existed based on the castle until the creation of the "new town" in the early 14th century.

# **3 Medieval archaeological evidence**

## **3.1 Medieval remains and buildings**

The castle was probably abandoned some time in the later 14th century. It has been greatly disturbed by post-medieval activity including the construction of the turnpike road in the 1770s and the late 19th and 20th century graves. Despite this, substantial sections of the bailey wall survive and the fragmentary remains of the keep stand up to 10m high. With the exception of the structural remains of the castle, the church of St John is the only standing building of medieval date in Ruyton. St John's has been described and the sequence of construction interpreted (SA 860; Crannage 1908; Pevsner 1958).

## **3.2 Medieval urban components**

Analysis of the evidence summarised above and of other documentary sources indicated the existence of twelve urban components. The characteristics of these urban components are summarised below.

**Castle** (SA 1123). The first castle at Ruyton was built sometime between 1086 and 1148 and was possibly a timber structure. This castle was destroyed in 1212 and is not mentioned in the fine on the manor levied in 1299 which suggests that it had not been rebuilt by this period (Kenyon 1891). By 1313, however, the castle was refortified. At this time, or shortly after, a stone keep and outer walls were constructed. The exact shape of the castle is not known but it was probably larger than the present churchyard and Gooseberry Lane may mark the line of the outer ditch (Brown 1988). Almost nothing is known of the internal arrangements of the castle but in the bailey the remains of the castle chapel are still preserved in the structure of St John's Church.

**Chapel** (SA 860). The present St John's Church was originally a chapel within the bailey of the castle. The chapel is documented in 1149-1159 and was probably in existence before 1148 (Kenyon 1896). Ruyton was part of the parish of Baschurch in the medieval period and did not have its own church, and it is probable that the castle chapel was used by the townspeople.

**Market place** (SA 5189). A market and fair were granted to the borough of Ruyton in 1311, but just under a century later in 1407 the town lost its market to Oswestry. The market place was probably the triangular area where School Road and Holden Lane join Church Street in the centre of the town. Church Street itself is wide and probably acted as an extension of the market place. From the available documentary evidence (Anon 1889; Kenyon 1891) it would seem that the triangular open space was the location of the Old Town Hall and town gaol (SA 5179), which was believed to date from the 15th century, and also of the Market Hall (SA 5178).

**Street system** (SA 5188). This component has been defined using Roque's map of 1752 and some of the information on old roads presented in Brown (1988). Surviving burgage plots fronting Church Street and School Road indicate that these roads were present in the medieval period and the remains of a road providing access to the burgage plots to the west of School Road can be seen on 19th century maps of the settlement (SA 5185). The road running west to east through the town joins Ruyton with Oswestry and Baschurch, the road to the north leads to the medieval township of Wikey, and that to the south to Shrewsbury. The line of the medieval road to the east of the town in the vicinity of the castle is not known, although Brown (1988) has suggested a route on the edge of the valley. The present main road in this area post-dates the abandonment of the castle and probably dates to the 1770s (Brown 1988).

**Tenement plots** (SA 5203, SA 5204, SA 5205, SA 5206, SA 5207, SA 5208). The *nova villa* of Ruyton was set out as a planned town to the west of the castle and the village. The 19th century maps show the remains of burgage plots fronting Church Street (SA 5204, SA 5208) and to the west of School Road (SA 5204). Just to the east of School Road the land is lower and more prone to flooding. The 19th century maps show no evidence of long thin burgage plots in this area but access to the river would have been important in the medieval period, when industries such as brewing are known to have been important to the town. In the post-medieval period other water based industries such as tanning and hemp weaving are known to have existed and these may have had their origins in the medieval period.

The village of Ruyton - the original settlement focus - was legally separate from the borough and topographically forms a distinct unit with the castle and two tenement plots (SA 5206, SA 5207). It seems likely however that this area, while legally distinct, functioned as part of the medieval town and indeed the 19th century maps show traces of long narrow tenement plots within this area (SA 5206).

**Mill** (SA 5182, SA 6270). Mills were an important part of the economy and at one time there had been "no less than five corn mills in Ruyton parish" (Anon 1889). Platt Mill (SA 6270) belonged to the manor and Brown (1988, 6-7) suggests that it was located to the northeast of the castle.

The 1838 tithe map shows a series of leats and the field name "mill meadow" on the northern edge of the town and it is possible that this site represents the town mill or "Ruyton Mill" (SA 5182).

### 3.3 Medieval urban form

**Definition and classification.** The medieval urban form (SA 5209) has been defined and mapped, based on the extent of the identified urban components. The available evidence indicates that the medieval urban form of Ruyton XI Towns can be classified as a small medieval market town (English Heritage 1992).

**Survival.** The 19th century excavations demonstrate that substantial structural remains of the bailey wall survive. The extent of buried remains within the fortifications is not known but field observations suggest deposits of rubble around the remains of the keep. There is no information on the nature and extent of buried remains in the rest of the town but certain assumptions can be made. The short life of the medieval town means that buried deposits are likely to be insubstantial, fragile and close to the surface. The settlement may have been less densely occupied after the 15th century which may mean that the early deposits are relatively well preserved. With the exception of the ruins of the castle the only medieval building to survive in Ruyton is St John's Church.

There is only moderate survival of medieval components in the modern settlement. The castle and tenement plots of the planned 14th century town can still be broadly identified on the ground but the location of the mills and the extent of occupation to the east of the church are less well defined.

## 4 Post-medieval archaeological evidence

With the loss of its market in 1407 Ruyton ceased to function as an urban centre, although it retained its borough status until the end of the 19th century. In the late medieval and post-medieval periods the settlement was a large village, with some local industries such as tanning (SA 6274), hemp and linen weaving, and glass manufacture (SA 2516). There are nine listed structures dating from the 17th to the 19th centuries within the study area.

## 5 Specialist assessments

### 5.1 Assessment of artefactual evidence J D Hurst

The only published medieval or post-medieval artefact reported from Ruyton is a reliquary (SA 5180) from near the castle.

### 5.2 Assessment of environmental evidence E A Pearson

No environmental archaeological remains have been recovered from Ruyton to date.

### 5.3 Assessment of documentary sources P A Stamper

Ruyton has extensive surviving medieval manorial documentation, its generation presumably a reflection of the efficient administration of the earl of Arundel's officials. In

all c 170 court rolls and bailiffs' account rolls survive from the period between the 1330s and the mid-16th century. There are also some 35 charters and other documents relating to property owned by Haughmond abbey in and around Ruyton. Later, post-medieval, records are by contrast rare. Principal groups of primary sources are listed in section 8. The main secondary sources consulted during the assessment include Eyton (1860) and Kenyon (1891, 1900, 1901a, 1901b). Secondary sources identified but not consulted during the assessment include Auden (nd), Cooper (nd), Hobbs (1961), Purton (1947-8) and Rees (1985).

#### **5.4 Assessment of building recording R Morriss**

The buildings of modern Ruyton are spread out along its very long main street, stretching westwards from the Cross to the Platt Bridge over the Perry at the eastern end of the village. Most of the buildings are of 19th century brick but there are several earlier survivals, both of 17th century timber-framing and of Georgian brickwork. It is an entirely rural settlement, the only buildings with any pretensions to urban status being the short late 18th century brick terrace of three houses in Church Street that incorporated the remains of a 17th century timber-framed structure (SA 13132, SA 13133). There is virtually nothing in the layout of the buildings to assist in any attempts in assessing its former urban status.

**Survey and analysis.** There has been little building survey work undertaken in the town although the Listing is extremely comprehensive and detailed.

**Assessment of the listing details.** The list dates to 1986 and is well up to, and in many ways exceeding, the standards now expected.

## **6 Archaeological research framework**

### **6.1 Model of urban development**

A model of the medieval town of Ruyton has been produced which is predictive and capable of testing through archaeological investigation. This model has both chronological and spatial (landuse) dimensions (see sections 2 to 4) and is based on an analysis of documentary, cartographic and archaeological sources. The model is derived from the current academic understanding of urban development in Britain, and forms one element of a developing regional research framework. The model is provisional and will be subject to confirmation or revision in the future as new information becomes available, or new studies lead to changing understandings of towns in the region.

### **6.2 Chronological framework**

The documentary evidence indicates that urban occupation commenced in the 14th century but developed from the nucleus of a medieval rural settlement close to the castle. The settlement was continuously occupied until the present but lost its urban function by the beginning of the 15th century. The broad outlines of this chronological framework are provisional and require testing through archaeological investigation. For example, topographic evidence suggests that the *nova villa* of Ruyton was planned, but it is not clear if this was a staged development or a single event. The chronology for the decline of the settlement post-1407 is also not understood.

### **6.3 Urban landuse**

The components identified here (section 3.2) have been mapped and constitute a model of urban landuse for the medieval period. This landuse model is partial and provisional and capable of testing through archaeological investigation.

The only urban component to have been archaeologically investigated is the castle. The

information from the 19th century excavation is very limited, however. In all the other urban components there is potential for recovering archaeological evidence relating to extent and function. Of particular interest would be more information on the location and date of the mills and the nature of activities carried out along the riverside. The development of the area around the castle and the layout of the medieval road system in this area is little understood and further fieldwork is necessary in this area.

#### **6.4 Potential for survival of buried remains**

No information is available on the depth of archaeological deposits in Ruyton, but it is probable that significant medieval and post-medieval remains are located beneath relatively shallow modern deposits. The earthworks and structures of the castle may have preserved ground surfaces relating to any earlier settlement. Of particular interest is the area by the river where waterlogged deposits relating to medieval domestic and industrial activity may be preserved. The decline of the settlement in the 15th century may have implications for the density and depth of deposits throughout the urban area.

Fieldwork was undertaken by the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey in November 1994. The extent of 18th and 19th century cellarge was mapped, together with the extent of 20th century development (new buildings and major landscaping work). This showed that there was little observable cellarge along the main streets but extensive modern redevelopment within the historic core.

#### **6.5 Potential for artefactual studies J D Hurst**

With the exception of the 19th century work at the castle no excavations have been undertaken in Ruyton and the extent of surviving artefactual evidence in buried deposits cannot yet be assessed in any detail. It is possible, however, that features such as the castle ditches could be of significance for artefactual evidence as they may include waterlogged finds. Due to the apparent decrease in intensity of Occupation after the medieval period medieval deposits and associated finds assemblages may have survived behind the frontages of the burgrave plots along the main street.

**Comparison with documentary evidence.** Documentary evidence suggests that brewing was a major local industry in the medieval period, as possibly was fish farming. Other crafts indicated by personal names were weaving, dyeing, and smithing. At present there is no artefactual evidence of these activities.

#### **6.6 Potential for environmental remains E A Pearson**

No environmental remains have been reported from Ruyton and the potential for the recovery of environmental remains and for research is largely unknown. As the soils are well drained, there is little potential for the preservation of organic remains by waterlogging, although it is possible that some may survive in silty deposits in millponds and fishponds. This material may provide information relating to the surrounding environment and to dumped occupational rubbish, particularly where tenement plots are close to the river. As the soils are acidic preservation of faunal remains such as animal bone and molluscs can be expected to be poor to moderate.

Environmental remains providing information on the occupation of the town, including evidence of industrial activities, may be recovered from, for example, the tenement plots. If buried soils are sealed beneath the earthworks of the castle, it may be possible to investigate the previous use of the land (for example, whether the land was under cultivation or pasture) using soil micromorphology and pollen analysis. In some cases there may be little other archaeological evidence for the use of the land.

As no environmental remains have been recovered in Ruyton, any environmental material would be of interest. This could provide information on the past environment, diet, living

conditions and agricultural or industrial economy. Future excavation should include a policy of sampling and wet-sieving deposits in order to recover plant, insect, molluscs and small animal remains in conjunction with hand-collection of larger items. Where appropriate, specialist sampling for soil and pollen analysis may be required.

#### **6.7 Potential for the study of standing buildings R Morriss**

Because of the relatively small number of pre-modern buildings in Ruyton XI Towns the potential for future study is limited.

#### **6.8 Summary of research potential**

The historic core of Ruyton contains buried archaeological deposits, and these are judged to have moderate potential. In addition there is moderate potential for the recovery of artefact assemblages, and low to moderate potential for the recovery of ecofact assemblages. However, these assemblages may need to be revised once archaeological deposits have been investigated with modern fieldwork approaches. The historic buildings do not constitute an extensive complementary body of evidence, and are judged to have low potential for detailed study and recording. The surviving documentary sources are extensive and consequently the potential for further study is high.

### **7 Management framework**

#### **7.1 Urban archaeological area**

The mapped extent of the medieval urban form defined above indicated the extent of the urban area (Ruyton XI Towns Urban Archaeological Area). The significance of the urban archaeological area is assessed below.

#### **7.2 Existing protection measures**

The different parts of the urban area are afforded different measures of protection through legislation and the planning process. Directly relevant measures are outlined below.

**Scheduled ancient monument.** There is one Scheduled Ancient Monument in Ruyton XI Towns, the castle (Shropshire no 71). It is possible that following the current Monument Protection Programme English Heritage may modify the scheduled area or add other monuments in Ruyton XI Towns to the schedule.

**Listed buildings.** There are a total of eleven structures listed as of historical or architectural importance within the urban area. Although unlisted, some other buildings are of considerable historic importance. The management of all historic buildings requires special care and attention, while the management of Listed Buildings is especially important. Listed Buildings are protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, and unauthorised alteration is a serious offence. This protection is also likely to preserve archaeological remains under and around such buildings and it is important that archaeological and historic building matters are considered together.

In Oswestry District, specialist advice on the management of historic buildings is provided by the District Council with support from the County Council. Some grant aid is available for the repair of historic buildings and information and advice is available from the District Council Conservation Officer.



### 7.3 Management approach

The archaeological urban area of Ruyton XI Towns contains earthworks and buried remains relating to medieval occupation, associated with contemporary buildings. The buried remains may vary in complexity and depth, and will contain significant archaeological information. It is desirable that any proposed development within the urban area that has a potential impact on earthworks or buried remains should be assessed by the appropriate archaeological body.

The course of action recommended will depend upon the nature of the development and current planning legislation and frameworks. The archaeological response will be based on both the archaeological information summarised in this document and any subsequent archaeological information recorded on the County Sites and Monuments Record.

### 8 Principal groups of documentary sources compiled by P A Stamper

(SPL: Shrewsbury Local Studies Library; SRO: Shropshire Record Office)

SPL Deeds	About 170 court rolls and bailiffs' account rolls 1330-1550. (A computerised catalogue is available)
SRO 171	Court roll 1380; compotus roll 1389
SRO 2106	Parish records. Registers from 1719 onwards; churchwardens' accounts 1774-1809; glebe terrier 1736
SRO 4208/83	Monumental inscriptions 1541-1984
SRO 1011	Map of 1778
SRO 2106	Survey c 1784
SRO 2106	Tithe map (1838) and apportionment (1840)

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Thompson, M W, 1991 *The rise of the castle*, Cambridge

Thorn, F, and Thorn, C (eds), 1986 *Domesday Book: Shropshire*, Chichester

## 10 Mapping

The illustrations for this report comprise CAD plots of the urban components for each period and a location plot of archaeological remains combined with OS digital map data (1995) at 1:5000. These plots are current at the date of the completion of this report (March 1995). After this date new information will be held by the Shropshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record.

- \* Historic buildings (listed and other recorded buildings) and urban area
- \* Archaeological remains and urban area
- \* Medieval urban form and components
- \* Observed cellarage and 20th century development
- \* Urban area and scheduled ancient monuments