

CAERWYS

- Early history of the town

Caerwys is one of the lesser-known Edwardian new towns of north Wales. It lies away from the coast, high in the hills between Rhuddlan and Flint at around 180m above sea level. A charter of October 1290 made the 'king's town' of Caerwys a 'free borough', and made 'the men there dwelling free burgesses', with a guild merchant, 'and all the liberties and free customs of a free borough as the king's burgesses of Aberconewey [Conwy] and Rothelan [Rhuddlan] and other boroughs in Wales have'.¹¹⁴ This wording shows that a settlement was there by then, with 'men there dwelling'. Ian Soulsby notes that the 'men of Kayroys' are referred to in 1242 and that St Michael's church was also there beforehand, the rector of Caerwys being mentioned in November 1284 with receipt of payment for sixty shillings 'for ecclesiastical damages in the Welsh war'.¹¹⁵ As evidence for an existing Welsh settlement there, Maurice Beresford points to the fact that in 1244 'the church of Caerwys was chosen by the Pope to be the meeting place of two Welsh abbots appointed to judge whether David had concluded his treaty with Henry III under duress or not', as well as a nearby 'house of the princes'.¹¹⁶ A list of taxpayers of 1292 records 43 of which 39 had Welsh names.¹¹⁷ This together with the earlier significance of the place points to Caerwys being a Welsh town conferred the status of an English borough by its charter in 1292, thus bringing it into Edward's network of new towns.

Some indication of the relative prosperity of Caerwys for the first few years after 1300 is provided by royal accounts. The 'vill of Caerwys' provided just over £5 per year in rents, far less than the nearby Flintshire new towns of Rhuddlan (around £30) and Flint (around £36).¹¹⁸ The town had a market and an annual fair, the latter held on the feast of the Decollation of St John the Baptist.¹¹⁹ It seems, though, that Caerwys was always in the shadow of its larger neighbours of Rhuddlan and Flint. Latterly, by the middle of the fourteenth century, even the town's mayor was the constable of Rhuddlan.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ CChR 1257-1300, p.372.

¹¹⁵ Soulsby, *Towns of Medieval Wales*, p.94, citing CChR, i, p.275; *Littere Wallie*, preserved in *Liber A in the Public Record Office*, ed. J. Goronwy Edwards (University Press, Cardiff, 1940), p.86.

¹¹⁶ Beresford, *New Towns*, p.48; see also RCAHMW, *Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Wales and Monmouthshire II, the county of Flint* (HMSO, London, 1912), pp.7-9.

¹¹⁷ Soulsby, *Towns of Medieval Wales*, p.95, note 4, citing PRO: E 179/242/52.

¹¹⁸ *Flintshire Ministers' Accounts, 1301-1328*, ed. A. Jones (Flintshire Historical Society, Prestatyn, 1913), p.100.

¹¹⁹ *Flintshire Ministers' Accounts, 1301-1328*, ed. Jones, p.25.

¹²⁰ *Flintshire Ministers' Accounts, 1328-1353*, ed. D.L. Evans (Flintshire Historical Society record series 2, 1929), p.xl: 'the constable of Rhuddlan, who was *ipso facto* mayor of Rhuddlan, [was] described as the mayor of the vill of Caerwys'.