

## CRICIETH

- The design and plan of the town

The castle sits on a knoll between the town and the sea, immediately overlooking the town's small, square-shaped market place. The layout of Cricieth is simple. It is based on a parallel street-system joined at the highest point in the middle by the market place, the whole plan forming an overall H-shape. One of these streets has evidently disappeared. Its course is preserved in plot and field boundaries shown by eighteenth and nineteenth century maps. The telling sign is the way that plots north of Castle Street are double the depth of those elsewhere in the town, and have running across them, midway along their length, a boundary that aligns with the north-east corner of the market square and falls on the same alignment as Lôn Bach ('little lane'). This 'lost' street thus ran east from the market and parallel to Castle Street. Building plots were strung out along these two streets, but probably not on Castle Street's southern (ie. castle) side, where a ditch has been suggested by the RCAHMW.<sup>186</sup> Field measurements have revealed that some of the plots shown by the first edition Ordnance Survey plan still retain their original 80 by 40 foot dimensions.<sup>187</sup> The plot patterns in the town are thus probably indicative of their thirteenth-century form. The stipulated standard burgage-size shows that care was taken over measuring out the town at the time of its foundation, and that there was concern over having regularity in the town's plot-layout. However, the streets are gently curving, sandwiching the town between the castle and the rocky outcrop of Dinas to the north. The parallel streets could easily have accommodated the 25 or so burgages that were being rented during the early 1300s, and so it looks as if the streets were planned to hold more plots than were actually occupied.

Who designed the town is not easy to determine since the documentation relating to the rebuilding of the castle offers few clues. From March 1283 the constable in charge of Cricieth – both town and castle – was Henry of Greenford, who a few months earlier had been at Rhuddlan.<sup>188</sup> He may have played a role in overseeing initial work at Cricieth during the period leading up to the chartering of the new town in November 1284. As 'a works officer' of the royal household, Greenford had also been present at Denbigh in 1282, during initial work there, and subsequently, 'when the court was in France and Gascony in 1286-7' he 'went ahead to make the advance arrangements for the king's accommodation', in both Paris and Bordeaux.<sup>189</sup> William of Leybourne, the castle's second constable, arrived by early 1285, seemingly too late to have had an influence in planning the town.<sup>190</sup> The layout of Cricieth offers few clues either. Its parallel street-pattern is not matched by any other Edwardian new towns in north Wales, though of course the size of its burgages – 60 by 80 feet – is shared by Caernarfon, and its charter was granted in September 1284, just a few months prior to Cricieth's.<sup>191</sup> There is the possibility, therefore, that whoever made decisions on the plot layout at Caernarfon was also influential at Cricieth. If so, clearly they did not employ Caernarfon's grid-plan of regular-sized street blocks, opting instead for a simpler layout, perhaps more fitting for a smaller town in a relatively remote position.

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<sup>186</sup> RCAHMW, Caernarvonshire, ii, figure 51.

<sup>187</sup> Field survey conducted in 2004: see 'Data downloads'.

<sup>188</sup> Taylor, *Welsh Castles*, p.73.

<sup>189</sup> Taylor, *Welsh Castles*, p.41, note 6.

<sup>190</sup> Taylor, *Welsh Castles*, p.73.

<sup>191</sup> See Caernarfon; CChR 1257-1300, p.278.