

## CRICIETH

- Early history of the town

Cricieth stands on the south side of Pen Llŷn, overlooking Tremadoc Bay, and facing across the water to Harlech in the distance. As well as their proximity and similar geographical positions there are some historical parallels between Edward's new towns of Cricieth and Harlech. Both received their borough charters on the same day, November 22 1284, their charters both being modeled on Conwy's, and both were relatively small boroughs without defences but with castles.<sup>174</sup> In the case of Cricieth though, the castle was not an English foundation but was of Welsh origin. It is mentioned first in 1239, and between 1259 and 1282 was held by Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, after which time the castle was in English hands, certainly by March 1283.<sup>175</sup> Arnold Taylor suggests the castle needed repairing at this time following slighting by the Welsh as they left it to Edward's forces, the cost perhaps being fairly small at around £500.<sup>176</sup>

It is possible that there was already a settlement established outside the Welsh castle before its capture by the English. Edward Lewis notes that 'the promise of a grant of sixty acres of land apiece had been held out to induce burgesses to settle around the castle', and that 'the nuclei of their borough lands were those pertaining to the *maenor* of Cricieth'.<sup>177</sup> It has also been suggested that St Catherine's church, situated a little distance away from Edward's new town, had an earlier, Welsh dedication.<sup>178</sup> The borough charter of November 1284 followed soon after the work carried out repairing the castle during 1283, and so the likelihood is that the new town was established some time late on in 1283, or early 1284. The borough was small. In the mid 1290s there were more soldiers in the castle than burgesses in the town. Nine burgesses are recorded at this time, though 'three of whom subsequently left', giving a total number of 71 inhabitants living there.<sup>179</sup> Surviving court and account rolls of the early 1300s reveal the early development of the new town.<sup>180</sup> In 1309 21<sup>1</sup>/<sub>3</sub> burgages were yielding 21s 4d in rent per year, rising to nearly 26 burgages by 1345, the maximum number recorded prior to the Black Death.<sup>181</sup> The burgesses held not only their burgages but also surrounding farm-land. In 1309 81 acres of arable land yielded 1d an acre.<sup>182</sup> The town's market also raised income for the king. It was held every week on a Thursday, but the tolls it generated were low, only 10d in 1326.<sup>183</sup> These early records reveal that the burgages in Cricieth were measured out to dimensions of 80 by 60 feet, the same size as Caernarfon's.<sup>184</sup> The rented areas of the town's arable fields were measured using the statute perch of 16<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> feet, however.<sup>185</sup> The records are silent on who in Edward's

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<sup>174</sup> CChR 1257-1300, p.280.

<sup>175</sup> Taylor, *Welsh Castles*, p.73; RCAHMW, *Caernarvonshire*, ii, pp.59-62.

<sup>176</sup> Taylor, *Welsh Castles*, p.74.

<sup>177</sup> Lewis, *Mediaeval Boroughs*, p.48.

<sup>178</sup> Soulsby, *Towns of Medieval Wales*, p.117; RCAHMW, *Caernarvonshire*, ii, p.57-8.

<sup>179</sup> Lewis, *Mediaeval Boroughs*, p.195.

<sup>180</sup> Lewis, 'Account roll of the Chamberlain', pp.256-75; W.G. Jones, 'The court rolls of the borough of Cricieth', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 2 (1925), pp.149-60; W. Rees, 'Minsters' accounts for the borough of Cricieth', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 3 (1926), pp.62-72.

<sup>181</sup> Rees, 'Ministers' accounts', pp.64, 66; see also Lewis, *Mediaeval Boroughs*, p.66.

<sup>182</sup> Rees, 'Ministers' accounts', p.63.

<sup>183</sup> Lewis, *Mediaeval Boroughs*, p.196: in 1310 the amount was 'a little over seven shillings'.

<sup>184</sup> Rees, 'Ministers' accounts', p.64; see also Lewis, *Mediaeval Boroughs*, p.63.

<sup>185</sup> Rees, 'Ministers' accounts', p.63.

entourage had come to Cricieth to set out the new town and measure its burgages to such precise dimensions.