

OVERTON

- Early history of the town

Overton has origins as a settlement well before the end of the thirteenth century. It appears in Domesday Book as a manor, and in the mid-twelfth century was the site of a castle in the hands of Madog ap Maredudd, prince of Powys.³¹⁴ In July 1279, Robert de Crevequer at his manor Overton received a charter from the king for a market to be held on Wednesdays, as well as an annual fair on the 'vigil, feast and morrow of the Nativity of St Mary and the twelve days following'.³¹⁵ In 1286 Edward granted Overton to his wife, Eleanor, having stayed there himself in September 1283 and October 1284.³¹⁶ During the queen's lifetime, before 1290, Thomas le Taverner and Richard de Felton received lands in Overton, but their descriptions seem to relate to large units of property rather than urban plots.³¹⁷

The grant of a borough charter by the king comes in January 1292.³¹⁸ It contains the usual privileges, making the town a 'free borough' and 'the men of the said town free burgesses', with their own prison, the right to elect representatives, and a 'gild merchant with a hanse and other customs and liberties thereto pertaining', plus a clause giving freedom to 'any man's bondman' who comes to live there and who remains there 'for a year and a day without being claimed'.³¹⁹ In the same year a total of 56 taxpayers were present there, and 12 others in the market, suggesting a distinction between it and the borough.³²⁰ A year later, Reginald de Grey 'was ordered to go in person to Overton to distribute burgages to those who wished to take them up', and 'burgesses were to build houses and live in them on the king's demesne lands', as well as arable land and woods.³²¹ From these woods 'they shall have the timber... to build their burgages'.³²² Grey was of course himself responsible for founding the new town and castle of Ruthin, in Denbighshire, established a decade earlier,³²³ and was therefore no doubt reasonably experienced in handling such matters.

The town was shortly 'badly ravaged' in the Welsh revolt of 1294-5.³²⁴ Expenditure followed on the castle in 1301-2, 'enclosing anew the garden of the Lord Prince of Overton... both with palings and a thorn hedge called Hurzun'.³²⁵ A little later again, in

³¹⁴ Soulsby, *Towns of Medieval Wales*, p.211. The castle was on the banks of the Dee, and by the sixteenth century had virtually disappeared.

³¹⁵ CChR 1257-1300, p.213.

³¹⁶ Soulsby, *Towns of Medieval Wales*, p.211, citing PRO: E 101/351/15; Beresford, *New Towns*, p.551, citing CPR 1281-92, p.75 and CChR 1257-1300, pp.278-9. See also *Flintshire Ministers' Accounts 1301-1328*, ed. Jones, pp.ix-xi.

³¹⁷ These grants are recorded in charters issued by the king in June 1292 but relate to 'the life-time of Eleanor the late queen'; CChR 1257-1300, pp.422-3. It has been suggested that these plots relate to the new town at Overton; Beresford, *New Towns*, p.551.

³¹⁸ CChR 1257-1300, p.414.

³¹⁹ CChR 1257-1300, p.414.

³²⁰ Beresford, *New Towns*, p.551, citing PRO: 179/242/52.

³²¹ *Flintshire Ministers' Accounts 1301-1328*, ed. Jones, pp.xl-xli, citing CClR, 1293, pp.285-6.

³²² CClR, 1293, pp.285-6.

³²³ See Denbigh; also Owen, 'Denbigh', pp.165-87.

³²⁴ Soulsby, *Towns of Medieval Wales*, p.211. At this time too Reginald de Grey, 'marching south-west from Rhuddlan, had considerable success in routing out Madog's men from the forests where they had taken shelter', Prestwich, *Edward I*, pp.223-4.

³²⁵ *Flintshire Ministers' Accounts 1301-1328*, ed. Jones, p.97. Also in May 1301 burgesses received a grant, *List of Welsh Entries in the Memoranda Rolls 1282-1343*, ed. N. Fryde (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1974), p.19.

1309, the burgesses of Overton sent a letter to the king explaining the effects of the revolt, complaining that the Welsh 'ought to rebuild, at their own cost, the king's manor and mills there' but 'have rebuilt nothing'.³²⁶ Subsequently, in 1403, 'Glyndŵr put it to flames and virtually destroyed the entire vill, forcing it to be largely abandoned by the English inhabitants', and by the sixteenth century the town had but twenty houses.³²⁷

³²⁶ Calendar of Ancient Petitions, ed. Rees, pp.340-1. Lewis, *Mediaeval Boroughs*, p.226 assigns a date of 1294 to this petition.

³²⁷ Soulsby, *Towns of Medieval Wales*, p.212.