

TRECASTLE

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Introduction

Trecastle (in Welsh, Trecastell) sits beside the A40 trunk road, 16km west of Brecon. It occupies gently sloping land on the north side of the Usk valley, with the river a few hundred metres to the south. A small stream, Nant Logyn, flows through the village from north to south, the micro-topography of its own valley influencing the appearance of the settlement. On the eastern edge of the village, the medieval motte and bailey castle that was instrumental in coining the place-name occupies higher ground.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Trecastle up to the year 1750. For the more recent history of the settlement, it will be necessary to look at other sources of information and particularly at the origins and nature of the buildings within it.

The accompanying map is offered only as an indicative guide to the historic settlement. The continuous line defining the historic core offers a visual interpretation of the area within which the settlement developed, based on our interpretation of the evidence currently to hand. It is not an immutable boundary line, and will need to be modified as new discoveries are made. The map does not show those areas or buildings that are statutorily designated, nor does it pick out those sites or features that are specifically mentioned in the text.

We have not referenced the sources that have been examined to produce this report, but that information will be available in the Historic Environment Record (HER) maintained by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust. The HER can be accessed on-line through the Archwilio website (www.archwilio.org.uk).

History of development

The name seems to mean 'the settlement by the castle', and appears in its present form in 1298. It was named as *Trecastel Toun*e in the period 1536-9 and as *Trecastell yn llywel* in 1600.

The motte and bailey castle on the eastern edge of Trecastle was thrown up at some point in the 12th century, probably earlier rather than later. It must have suffered during the Welsh insurrections of that century, but was not sufficiently important to merit a mention in contemporary documents. Yet clearly it functioned long enough to facilitate the foundation of an adjacent settlement and for that settlement to thrive if only in a minor way, somewhere close to the border that separated the medieval lordship of Brecon from that of Carmarthen.

The eastern half of Trecastle was administered as an outlying part (or detached ward as Samuel Lewis termed it) of Brecon borough, though there are hints that it was a borough in its own right. But throughout its existence it lay within the ecclesiastical parish of Llywel and western Trecastle constituted a detached portion of the Bishop of St David's chief manor at Llanddew, modern maps still carrying the label Bishops' Town. In 1290/91 it was one of the Bishop's holdings that was granted an annual fair and weekly market by Edward I.

In the late 1530s, John Leland claimed that it was 'sumtime a large borow and market, now much in ruine, wherby yet apperith the ruines of a castel'. He also differentiated Trecastle from Bishop's Town on the opposite side of the stream on the basis of their differing lordships. 'Ther is building on the farther side of this river [the Luggun] hard joining to

Trecastel, and is caullid the Bisshops Toun, and it kepith Lawday at Llan[ddew] lordship a myle from Brekenok (as Trecastel dothe at Brekenok)'.

In 1675 it was classed only as a small village and Ogilby on his map at that date attributed the name Trecastle to the village west of Nant Logyn, that is Bishop's Town. The eastern part of the village probably gained extra prominence in the 18th century when the turnpike road incorporated stretches of earlier routes including that to the east of the stream, but Lewis' description of it in 1833 is telling: 'a cluster of several houses, among which is a good inn and posting-house, from which it derives all the little importance it possesses'.

The heritage to 1750

The fine motte and bailey castle occupies slightly higher ground on the eastern edge of the village. As noted above virtually nothing of its history is documented.

The settlement at Trecastle has twin foci. Immediately to the west of the castle lie a series of properties with narrow tenements behind them looking, on modern maps, rather like burgage plots. This however is deceptive for an estate map of 1780 shows few properties to the north of the road with more to the south, and it is apparent that some of the narrow tenements are of 19th-century origin. The original road then curved westwards, Login Terrace marking its line, crosses Nant Logyn and then after one hundred metres or so arcs northwards to meet another street running westwards to Mynydd Trecastell (and this in turn is likely to have been the Roman road from Brecon Gaer to Llandovery). The first part of this was known as Bishop Street in 1780 and constituted the core of Bishop's Town, with almost as many dwellings fronting on to it as in Trecastle east of Nant Logyn. This pattern of streets represents the medieval settlement.

Post-medieval changes (between say the 16th and 18th centuries) focus on the development of the turnpike road that is now the A40. Its present course north-westwards from where Vicarage Road runs off it to almost as far as Llywel may be entirely a creation of the turnpike era – this is the implication of Ogilby's 1675 map.

Plausibly there was a market at Trecastle but this seems to be linked to Bishop's Town. Would Brecon borough's part of Trecastle have had its own market? It has been suggested that the patch of ground north-west of Bush House reveals the presence of a triangular market place. But we can note on the 1780 map a widening of the main street by Neuadd Farm at the east end of the village, with a couple of buildings set in the road, and also a curious layout of lanes that surround Mill House. Largely obscured by subsequent developments during the earlier part of the 19th century, these could reveal where there was a medieval market.

One final anomaly in the village topography is the curving lane that links the two built up parts of Trecastle. What if anything was the purpose of the area that it defined (and now filled by the school, a chapel and several houses); could it have been a 'village green'?

With one exception the village has no buildings of particular interest. Neuadd has at its core a house with 17th-century features, its status reflected perhaps by the fact that it was in the ownership of the Gwynne family, one of whose members was high sheriff of the county in the early 17th century. Much of the building though is late 18th- or 19th-century in date, becoming an inn well before the middle of the 19th century. All the other buildings in eastern Trecastle appear to be 19th- or even 20th-century, influenced by the presence of the turnpike. Interestingly, no buildings of any antiquity has been recognised in Bishop's Town.

A dam consisting of an earthwork 76m long and over 2m high lies just to the north of the A40 and ponds the waters of Nant logyn. This was supposedly constructed by the Gwynne family:

meadows between Trecastle and Llywel were converted into a lake and fish pond and tradition has it that the family were rowed to church at Llywel.



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