

Caergwrle

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Introduction

Caergwrle is situated on the west bank of the River Alyn, some 7km to the north-west of Wrexham. The village extends over flattish ground where the lowest slopes of Hope Mountain tip down to the river in a series of gentle terraces. The castle straddles a steep-sided knoll to the south of the village, detached from Hope Mountain by a dry valley which is now followed by the A541.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Caergwrle 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. Numbers in brackets are primary record numbers used in the HER to provide information that is specific to individual sites and features. These can be accessed on-line through the Archwilio website (www.archwilio.org.uk).



Caergwrle, photo 88-c-0024, © CPAT, 2012

History of development

The earliest form of the name may be *Kaierguill* in 1278, though there is some doubt about this. It developed into *Caergorlei* in 1327, and was given as *Gaergwrlai* at some point between 1450 and 1490. The most recent authoritative work on Welsh place-names suggests that there was a Mercian (*i.e.* Saxon) settlement called *Corley* on the banks of the Alyn. Attractive as this idea might be, it is unsupported by any solid evidence.

Caergwrle Castle was founded by Dafydd ap Gruffudd perhaps in 1278, though conceivably a year or so earlier, within the lordship of Hopedale which had been granted to him by Edward I in the previous year. When Dafydd revolted against English overlordship in 1282, the castle immediately fell into the hands of the king. Under English control a town was being laid out below the castle by the following year, and a charter allowed for four annual fairs and a weekly market. Damaged by fire later in the year, the castle was subsequently conferred on the Prince of Wales, but its strategic importance appears to have dwindled and by 1335 it was a ruin, the Black Prince's surveyors reporting 'only a place called the castle of Hope, whose walls and towers are largely thrown down and there is no housing there'.

The town of Caergwrle was termed *Hope ad Castrum*, *i.e.* 'Hope at or below the Castle', and this had led some writers to confuse it with the village of Hope nearby. Thirty-five taxpayers were recorded in 1292, and it seems to have been regarded as a borough in the first half of the 14th century if not earlier, being described as such in 1347 and again in 1349/50. Initially, both native Welsh and English incomers held burgages, but the charter of 1351 altered this and the Welsh burgages were confiscated and presumably the indigenous Welsh expelled. It appears that the Constable of the castle also functioned as the mayor of the borough, at least in the early years.

The town was attacked in 1403 by Glyndŵr's army when it was 'burnt and completely destroyed'. The effect was protracted. Though it was designated as a contributory borough with other Flintshire towns in the election of a member of parliament in the 1530s, Leland travelling around the country at much the same time thought it a 'toun... now decayid'. And in the early 17th century, John Speed failed to list it among the principal towns of Flintshire.

An estate map of *c.*1790 points to a relatively small population and even at the time of the tithe survey, the pattern of houses was dispersed, and the grid pattern of streets fragmented. Despite this it is one of the relatively few nucleated settlements in Flintshire dating from the Middle Ages.

The heritage to 1750

Caergwrle has a late 13th century stone castle (101295) set on a steep-sided isolated hill. Earthworks accompany the stone curtain wall, but there is nothing to suggest that there was already a castle in existence earlier in the 13th century. Radiocarbon dates from Clwyd County Council's extensive excavations on the site in the 1980s do, however, hint at a late Roman or early medieval date for the enclosure bank, much more extensive than the medieval castle around the top of the hill.

The form of the planted town is clearly visible in the modern street pattern with three parallel lanes on a north-west/south-east axis that is influenced by the line of the river valley, and three others, two of them dog-legged, crossing at right angles. It has been assumed that all of these streets had their origin in the medieval period: the most westerly of the three main north-west/south-east streets is not depicted on the estate map of *c.*1790, but this could be because it had partially been abandoned as a thoroughfare in the post-medieval era, as the tithe map confirms, and only reinstated in the 20th century. High Street and to a lesser extent Derby Road are both broad thoroughfares, the houses lying back from the modern road. In contrast the side lanes such as Hope Street and Gwalia are noticeably narrow. The estate map

seems to show that in the late 18th century, many more dwellings lay on Derby Road than on High Street.

A small triangle of land bounded by Castle Street on the south and unnamed lanes lies on the eastern edge of the village, beneath the castle's shadow. Its role in the development of the settlement is not documented, although it is depicted on the c.1790 map as an open space with one small encroachment. It may have been the early market place, but is perhaps more likely to have been an open space or common, as at Caerwys or Northop. Perhaps significantly the records indicate that there was a lock up and or pound here in the 19th century.

There is no suggestion that the town was ever protected by defences and no indication of the density of medieval occupation on the street frontages. In Hope Street is a stone-lined outlet for spring water, known as The Pystill (105930) which presumably provided a water supply for the plantation.

Caergwrle never had a parish church – Hope functioned in this way – but a chapel of ease (101297) is documented in the Middle Ages. This was supposedly in the vicinity of Plas-yn-bwl, but no remains have been identified.

Plas-yn-bwl house (105931) contains remodelled 16th century or earlier work. The Derby Arms (105926) is attributed to the 17th century but has been much altered. Lilac Cottage on Derby Road is thought to be a 17th century stone encasing of a late medieval hall-house, and down from it is Ty Gwyn, an early to mid-18th century house. No other buildings pre-dating the 19th century have been identified.

A fine packhorse bridge (101283), probably constructed in the 17th century but of more than one build, takes Fellows Lane across the River Alyn to Hope.



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