

Mold

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Introduction

Mold occupies the west bank of the shallow Alyn Valley on ground that undulates gently, except for the knolls on which the castle and church stand, the former separated from the latter by a saddle or dry re-entrant. It is the county town of Flintshire inasmuch as the headquarters of the local authority lie on its edge. It straddles a major crossroads, with the A494 trunk road from the Dee and Chester running south-westwards towards central Wales via Ruthin, while the A451 from Wrexham runs towards the north Wales coast.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Mold 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).

History of development

The circular churchyard at Mold is obvious, and this alone suggests that the church came into existence in the early medieval period, prior to the Conquest and well before the Norman lords of Moldsdale established their castle on the adjacent hill top. It may even have been the mother church for the region, but this is considerably more speculative. Even if there was a church here prior to the Conquest, we should not assume that a settlement developed around it in these early times. In a similar vein, even if the neighbourhood of Mold was indeed the venue for the so-called 'Alleluia Victory' in AD 429 when native forces led by Bishop Germanus drove back the Saxons, as reported by Bede, it does not imply that there was any significant settlement in the area.

The names of the castle and town and the Norman lords who established them are interwoven. The earliest form of the name, linked to those lords, came between 1151 and 1181 as *Montealto*. Sir John Lloyd considered that the Norman conquerors would have termed the hill *Mont haut* (in Old French) which in Latin would have become *Mons Altus* and which was gradually transformed into *Mohault*, *Moald* (in 1284) and finally *Molde* (in 1341). Possibly the original name was transferred from France where there are several places called Monthaut. The English name bears no relation to the Welsh name for the place, *Yr Wyddgrug*, which Lloyd translated as 'the burial mound', raising the possibility, though it must be stressed that it is no more than that, of the motte being constructed around a prehistoric barrow. More recent place-name authorities suggest that the Welsh name could simply mean 'high hill' or 'prominent mound'.

The Norman lords of Moldsdale, the Montalts, built the earthwork castle here, probably in the earlier 12th century, although a date as early as c.1093 has also been advanced. The first

historical mention of the castle was in 1146 when it was captured by Owain Gwynedd, although the site must obviously have been rather older than this. It was reportedly damaged if not destroyed by Llywelyn ab Iorwerth in 1199, was repaired in 1241 when it was termed a royal stronghold, and was then taken in 1245 by Dafydd ap Llywelyn and reputedly levelled. That this was only a temporary occurrence is revealed by the fact that Mold was retaken by Edward I in 1276-7, its continuing appearance in the national records indicating that it had been and remained a significant military fortification. The last of the Montalts died in 1329, and it may be from that time that the castle declined in importance, but there are later references to the 'castle and town' of Mold in the Charter and Patent Rolls of the 1330s, and in an Inquisition Post Mortem of 1415 and again in 1421. Taking these at face value, it would seem that the castle continued to function in some fashion into the 15th century.



Mold, photo 08-c-0182 © CPAT 2012

As a town, *Monte Alto* was consistently referred to in conjunction with the castle in *Inquisitions Post Mortem* as well as Chancery and other national records as early as 1267 and throughout the 14th century, and there can be no doubt that the lords of Moldsdale laid out a town below their castle. The absence of references to a charter may indicate that this was a borough by prescription. Leland's remarks on its market and fairs (for which see below) are relevant, and perhaps as important, there are two legal documents from 1506 and 1611, which refer to burgages (i.e plots of land held by burgesses) in the town. Furthermore, the Survey of the manor of Mold in 1652 contains a note of 'all ye Burgages or tenements in Mould...'.

By the late 15th century the lordship had passed to the Stanley family and in 1477 records refer to numerous town officials, the lord's mills, one of them at Rhydgolau, and his courthouse in the town.

In the 1530s, John Leland remarked that there was a belief that Mold had once been a market town; its two annual fairs continued but its weekly market had been abandoned, and in name at least it had a mayor. There were two main streets, 'Steate Byle [Beili] and Streate Dadlede [Dadleu-dy]', and other little lanes. A great number of houses were largely destroyed, and in all there were no more than 40 houses. He also stated that 'at the northe ende of Byle Streate appere ditches and hilles yn tokyn of an auncient castel or buildinge there. It is now caullid Mont Brenebyley, and on the side of it is a fayre springe'.

Edward Lhwyd records 'about six score houses, including huts', and also mentioned the local coal industry and two annexed chapels at Treuddyn and Nercwys together with a third at Capel Spon.

Mold developed as the administrative centre for Flintshire at a late date. The Quarter Sessions were based here from 1769; the county hall was established here in 1833, the county gaol in 1871.

The heritage to 1750

St Mary's church (100081) is a fine late Perpendicular rebuilding, though construction work continued in the post-Reformation period. Traces of a medieval chancel exist but the present structure was added in 1853-56. The west tower was built in 1868-73, replacing a medieval predecessor. Significant features include the perpendicular nave arcades. Within the building, there is a 14th century grave slab (100080), some later 16th century stained glass commemorating a vicar who died in 1576 and the 3rd Earl of Derby who died in 1572; a small 17th century hatchment, a later 17th century altar table, and a range of wall memorials which commence with a mid-16th-century bishop of Hereford, and a brass of 1602.

Up to ten stone heads (PRN 100075), some almost certainly corbels, are now built into wall that surrounds Tan-y-coed, fronting the Cilcain Road below Bailey Hill. Some of the heads have been ascribed to the late 15th century but others could have come from a late 12th century building. It is generally assumed that these were salvaged from the church during a rebuilding phase. Other architectural fragments have also been set on the garden wall and it is reported that various architectural fragments are (or were) incorporated into a rockery in the Vicarage garden, with more in the garden of a house called Mont Alto.

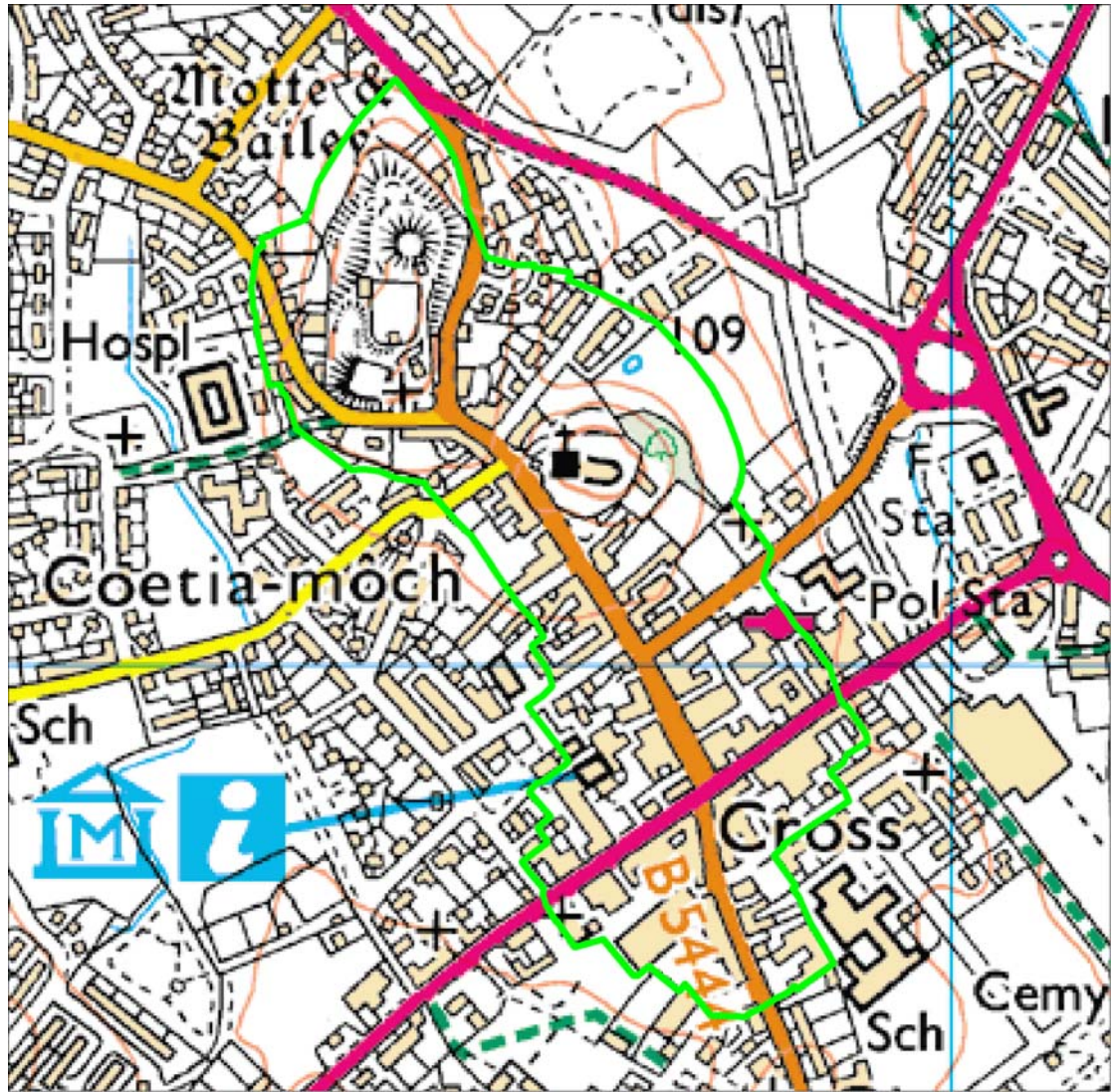
The churchyard (19917), despite some enlargement, displays strong curvilinearity and is raised on all sides, particularly on the south-west where it is 3m or more above the road.

The castle (100078) is a Norman motte with two baileys in line surmounting a natural hillock, the whole site originally extending over about 2.2ha. The motte is in reasonable condition, and may once have been surmounted by a stone shell keep though only a few traces of stonework are now visible. Both baileys have strong defences but their interiors have

undoubtedly been disturbed by the construction of a bowling green, playground and other works.

The core of the town with a central main street, wide enough for a market, and streets running in at right angles points to a planned design of medieval origin which was probably in existence from at least the 13th century. Running south-eastwards from the main entrance of the castle is High Street which in the 16th century was called *Byle Streate*. Even modern maps show that this still widens out gradually towards its southern end, implying that this formed a market place in earlier centuries. The name, the Cross which is still in current usage logically describes the road layout here, but it is also tempting, if speculative, to see in it a reference to a former market cross. At right angles to High Street was what are now Chester Street and New Street, the latter name suggesting that this was an addition to the original urban layout. The Lower Market Hall also known as the Assembly Hall, built in 1849 on the corner of New Street and High Street, replaced the old leet courthouse of the manor of Mold which was constructed before 1477. On the southern side of High Street, the earliest Ordnance Survey maps and, more obviously, the Tithes Map show narrow tenements stretching back from the street frontage. Had Mold been clearly documented as a borough, these would readily have been classed as burgage plots. As these tenements appear to be anywhere between 46m and 121m long, they are readily comparable with such medieval landholdings elsewhere.

Mold has a range of attractive buildings but most are later Georgian or Victorian in origin. Only one has been identified within the centre of the town which predates the 18th century. No.95 High Street (31976) has 17th century origins, but was altered in the 18th century. No 24 High Street (31967) is attributed to the early to mid-18th century.



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