

Knucklas

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Introduction

Knucklas Castle, 4km north-west of Knighton, rests on a prominent hill that forms the terminal of the spur between the River Teme and its tributary, the Ffrwdwen Brook. On the further side of the brook but still in the lee of Castle Hill is the village of Knucklas, just above the valley floor.

This brief report examines Knucklas's emergence and development up to 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 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 may 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).



Knucklas village, photo 84-C-0316 © CPAT, 2011

History of development

The Welsh name of this settlement is Cnwclas but it is as *Knoclas* that it is first documented in the years between 1220 and 1227. The Welsh elements – *cnwc* and *glas* – simply mean 'green hillock'.

Beyond the eastern edge of the present settlement, the site of a battle in 1146 AD (1143) is reputedly commemorated in the name 'Bloody Field'.

It is believed that the castle was built by the Mortimers in c.1220-25, but was destroyed by Llywelyn in 1262, and again perhaps by Owain Glyndŵr in 1402. It is said that by 1403 it no longer existed. Very much later towards the end of the 19th century, it provided a convenient source of stone for Knucklas viaduct.

There are documentary references to a town here in the Middle Ages, and its establishment and growth must have been as a result of the presence of the castle. Substantive ground evidence for a settlement is, however, absent. It has been suggested though without any corroborative evidence that the settlement may have declined terminally after 1262, for the castle was apparently not refurbished.

Knucklas was one of five boroughs returning a joint Member of Parliament in 1536, burgages were recorded in 1649, and as late as the second quarter of the 19th century it was still recognised as a borough under the control of a bailiff and burgesses with a court house. The village then consisted only of a dozen or so cottages, 'mean and inconsiderable in appearance' according to the Radnorshire historian, Jonathan Williams, at the beginning of the 19th century. Perhaps then this might explain why there appears to be not a single dwelling within the village that pre-dates 1800. Nevertheless, the absence of any pre-19th century buildings is hardly reassuring in seeking medieval beginnings for the settlement.

Today, Knucklas' appearance is unexceptional with cottages and houses immediately to the south side of the brook spreading between the two lanes that part company and then further west rejoin, and a small estate on the road leading to Knucklas Station and an engineering works.

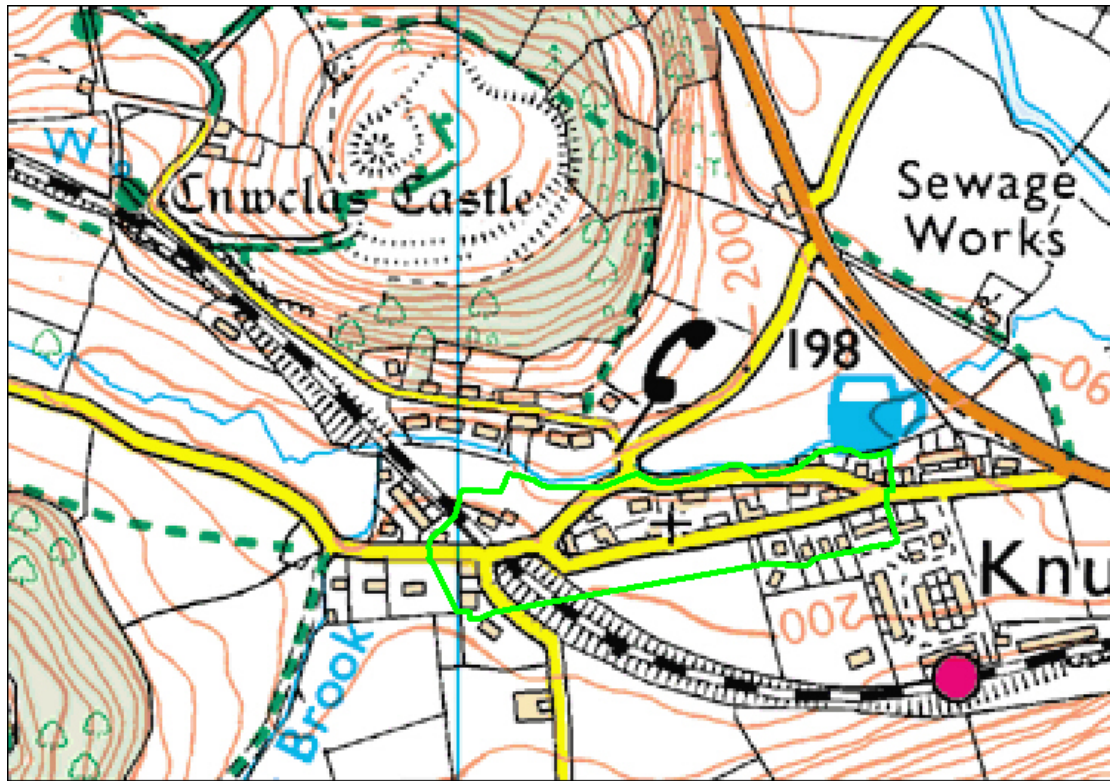
The heritage to 1750

Knucklas Castle (1126; SAM Rd085) is a medieval earthwork thrown up within what may well have been an Iron Age hillfort, distinguished as a large oval enclosure with a possible entrance on the west side. A second, rather slight, inner perimeter scarp is apparent on aerial photographs and may also be prehistoric in date. A platform perhaps represents part of a masonry castle, although little stonework remains, and the hilltop has been extensively quarried. Within the enclosure, other platforms on the north and east remain to be dated.

The medieval borough is something of a mystery. The most likely location is between the stream and the more southerly of the two lanes through the village, but as yet there is little evidence to support this contention, and this tract of land is now largely built over. A solitary evaluation in 1999 to the south of the more southerly lane produced evidence of Roman activity but nothing of medieval date.

There was also a mill on the Ffrwdwen Brook, first referenced in 1384 (72377) when the customary tenants of Radnor had to carry two millstones to the lord's mill at Knucklas. 19th-century references to 'the old mill' may signify its position.

The other outstanding feature of Knucklas is the viaduct which, however, is later 19th-century in origin (20655; Grade II listing).



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