

Rhuddlan

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Introduction

Rhuddlan is situated on the east bank of the River Clwyd, approximately 4km inland from where the river empties into the estuary. It occupies fairly level ground raised well above the river and the formerly marshy grounds that lay to the west and north, its position carefully selected which to a large degree accounts for the longevity of Rhuddlan as a settlement. Three major roads enter this small town, the A547 (east/west), the A525 (north/south) and the A5151 from the south-east.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Rhuddlan 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 in particular 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 require modification 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

Rhuddlan is a highly favoured location for settlement and its very long period of use is reflected in the features and finds of many periods revealed by the standing structures and by excavations in the town. It reflects both the lowest crossing of the River Clwyd by ford, and the highest point reached by tides. Communications with areas to the west and east were enhanced by the fact that land routes could skirt around the northern end of the Clwydians.

The name Rhuddlan should be translated as 'red bank', and is derived from the red colour of the soil on the riverbank where the town is situated. This is straightforward, more so than the number of name forms that have been identified for it. From the 10th century though only appearing in a late 13th copy is the term *brudglann*. Domesday Book in 1086 has *Roeland*, *Ruthelan* was used in c.1191, *Rothelan* in c.1253 and *Rundlan* a year later. *Rodlan* appeared in 1291, *Rhuttlan* in 1320, *Rudlan* in the 14th century and *Ruthlan* in 1437. The present name's first showing seems to have been in 1577-8, but other variants continued to appear including *Rutland* in 1582. In addition, an entirely different appellation, *Cledmutha*, reflecting the mouth of the Clwyd, was recorded in AD 921 and is generally believed to refer to an early settlement here.

Rhuddlan is first referred to in connection with the defeat of the Welsh by King Offa in the battle of Morfa Rhuddlan at the end of the 8th century. There is a documentary reference in the chronicles compiled at a later date to *bellum Rudglann* in AD 796. Then, in 921 the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records the foundation of a *burh* at *Cledmurtha*, primarily to obstruct Viking raids. Opinion has varied as to whether this was at Rhuddlan itself or closer to the coast, but the weight of evidence, particularly archaeological, now favours the former. Regardless of its location, it seems unlikely that it functioned for long.

Rhuddlan is reputed to be the site of the stronghold (*palatium*) of Llewelyn ab Seisyll, built in 1015, perhaps on Twt Hill. It passed to his son, Gruffydd ap Llywelyn of Gwynedd, and his *llys* there was destroyed by Earl Harold in 1063.



Rhuddlan motte (Twt Hill) with castle and town in the background, photo 85-C-0312, © CPAT 2014

After the Norman Conquest, a motte and bailey castle was built in about 1073, probably on top of the *llys* at Twt Hill, by Robert of Rhuddlan, the deputy of Hugh of Chester. A small borough was founded by the castle and was referred to in Domesday Book. It revealed that there were eight burgesses there as well as the mint. A church is mentioned, and it seems highly likely that this was the structure found in Henrietta Quinnell's excavations on Ysgol-y-Castell playing fields (see 101950) rather than on the site of the present church. Her excavations revealed that the Norman borough was located immediately to the south-east of Rhuddlan Castle, and that its defences enclosed an area of 7ha which incorporated the Twt Hill motte and bailey (102026).

To what degree Rhuddlan prospered under its Norman lords is unknown, but in 1140 during the English civil war known as the Anarchy, the town fell under Welsh control and apart from a brief English resurgence in 1211-3 generally remained in Welsh hands until 1241. A further period of Welsh control under Llywelyn ap Gruffudd began in 1256 and continued until Edward I's campaign in 1277.

In that year it is likely that the town ditch was thrown up to enclose 30 ha that included the earlier Norman borough and the Dominican friary, butting up against what was to become Edward's stone castle, also begun in 1277. Plans to canalise the lower reaches of the Clwyd river were drawn up and the work was probably completed by the end of 1280, facilitating access to the sea and providing waterfront access for the castle. The first mention of the new borough at Rhuddlan came in the early part of 1278 – planned on a grid system of streets, it lay to the north-west of the new castle and had its own defences, though these appear to have remained incomplete during the earlier 1280s and may perhaps have been completed by the burgesses rather than the king. The king's plan to move the see of St Asaph to Rhuddlan came to nothing, but a new church was subsequently built within the borough. The town achieved

some lasting fame for the fact that it was here that Edward drew up the Statute of Rhuddlan (also known as the Statute of Wales) which created the constitutional basis for the government of North Wales for two and a half centuries and led to the counties of Anglesey, Merionethshire, Caernarfonshire, and Flintshire being established.



Rhuddlan Castle, photo 2160-0004, © CPAT 2014

By 1292 the town had 75 taxpayers and in later years it can be assumed to have prospered though probably not significantly. The absence of a market is worth noting, Caerwys being recorded at a later date as the only market centre in post-medieval Flintshire. More than a century separated the town's establishment from its destruction, in 1403, during the Glyndŵr rebellion, although the castle itself remained in English hands. The town was back under English control in 1406-7, but in 1428 only 37 burgages were recorded though there is uncertainty as to whether this was an accurate figure.

Rhuddlan was mentioned by Leland in the 1530s but the absence of any description suggests that the town made little impression on him, and it is the infrequency of records on the town that implies that Rhuddlan was not developing to the same degree as other urban centres. A summary of Elizabethan ports in 1561/2 records Rhuddlan as 'a barred haven and a good Creke where is a noble Castell of ye Kings and well kept'. From the 16th century the main harbour developed downstream from the bridge, initially extending for around 100m on either bank, but later focusing on the wharfage along the eastern bank.

The castle's importance declined; it appears to have become dilapidated and neglected, and when the Civil War broke out in the 1640s expensive repairs were needed to make it fit to receive the king's garrison. Rhuddlan castle surrendered to Parliament in 1646 and was slighted in 1648. As a port, though, Rhuddlan continued to have its uses and the King had several vessels there in 1646, laden with corn, bacon and other provisions waiting to relieve the siege of Chester.

Edward Lhuyd's correspondent at the very end of the 17th century noted its borough status with two bailiffs, and estimated that there were about 68 houses in the town and another 30 in 'ye Liberty', presumably the suburbs.

Our earliest map of the town, drawn in 1756, shows a small settlement with the church and castle. Most of the houses are contained within the Edwardian defences and there are plenty of vacant plots, but little evidence of an expanding community. Only a few houses are scattered east of the castle in the old town.

Even in the 19th century Rhuddlan was still little more than a large village, consisting of one main street intersected by several smaller thoroughfares, and the streets only partially paved. Richard Colt Hoare, passing through it in 1801 classed it ‘a mean village situated on the banks of the Clwyd’. The port still functioned, and quays, wharfs and warehouses constructed. It had become a depot supplying coal, food stuffs, and the like to towns deeper into the Vale of Clwyd, but the principal trade was the export of grain and timber and, from the Talargoch mines, lead ore.

The heritage to 1750

Producing a coherent and detailed narrative of Rhuddlan where standing structures are complemented by regular archaeological works is outside the scope of this brief report. The last such narrative was published by Henrietta Quinnell in 1994, and in the intervening years some interesting discoveries have been made in advance of development. Here, we have listed the known features, standing and below ground level, according to type and context. We can express a hope that a fuller synthesis might be prepared in the not-too distant future.

Buildings

St Mary's Church (102048) is a double-naved church with a west tower. Built on a new site around 1300, the north nave and tower were added late in the Middle Ages. Restoration occurred in 1812 and again in 1868-70. A mausoleum was appended to the north nave in 1820. Little architectural detailing of the 13th century now remains, though some of the windows suggest that the Victorian replacements were faithful to the originals. The interior was also restored, but the late medieval roofs and the 15th-century arcade were retained. There are several 13th and 14th-century effigies and sepulchral slabs; patches of 17th-century wall paintings and an early 18th-century parish chest, but one would have hoped for more medieval survivals including the font.

The churchyard is rectangular as might be anticipated for a settlement planned on a grid pattern. There have been minor alterations to its outline, particularly in the 19th century, but it is largely as it was in the medieval period. The base of the churchyard cross remains.



Rhuddlan Church and Castle, photo 2160-0006, © CPAT 2014

Rhuddlan Castle (102031) is one of Edward I's great castles. It was concentric with the inner ward wall surviving and sporting two round angle towers and two gatehouses, while the outer ward wall has gone. The outer moat still rings the castle on the sides away from the River Clwyd.

There has been a bridge over the Clwyd (102034) since the 13th century. A timber bridge was destroyed in about 1277 and immediately replaced, and the first stone bridge was constructed

in c.1358. It was rebuilt in 1595 and parts of this bridge remain, although there have been more recent alterations to it.

Abbey Farm (102025), formerly known as Plasnewydd, is on the site of the Dominican friary, founded here prior to 1258 and dissolved in 1538. Much of the friary church was still standing in the middle of the 18th century but had gone by the time that Thomas Pennant visited it in 1784. The farmyard occupies the site of the cloister garth and part of the south cloister range is now incorporated into a barn; some blocked windows survive, probably 14th-century. Medieval building materials have been re-used and the east range of the farm buildings incorporates some sepulchral slab fragments and there is a niche with a much-eroded 14th-century effigy in it (123752). It has been recorded in the past that stone coffins and human remains have been unearthed, presumably from the friary cemetery.



A reused grave marker at Rhuddlan Friary, photo 3205-0046, © CPAT 2014

Parliament House (102032) on Parliament Street incorporates a blocked 13th-century doorway and a 14th-century cusped ogee window. Neither are thought to be in situ, and probably originated at the castle. Although an inscription associates Edward I with this site and with a parliament, these views are unsubstantiated.

The Banquet House (102047) on Princes Road is dated to 1672 and is considered to be a sophisticated late 17th-century vernacular building. It is a tall, compact, two-storeyed building with coped gable ends, and some mullioned windows and a doorway with a four-centred archway.

Earthworks

Twt Hill motte and bailey (102026) was built in 1073 by Robert of Rhuddlan, and according to tradition occupies the site of the Welsh palace of Gruffydd ap Llywelyn. The motte is 80m in diameter, with a height of 5m on its north side and 12m on the south (river) side. The bailey bank to the north is ploughed down.

Town defences

The remains of early town defences (17761) lie to the south-east of the castle. The bank-ditch-bank combination (17648), known as 'Town Ditch', enclose an area of c.30 ha and were once considered to be the defences of the Saxon *burh* of *Cledmutha*, but are now generally thought to be the first Edwardian town defences from 1277, playing little obvious part in the protection of the town of Rhuddlan in later years.

The corner of the Edwardian borough defences in the form of a ditch and an outer bank (101958) survive to the north-east of Gwindy Street and is now surrounded by housing and other buildings. The earthworks were partially excavated in 1971, but further work in 1989 (17461) and 1993 (17847) along the supposed line of the ditch adjacent to Gwindy Street failed to locate any trace of defences.

Road widening work at Lon Hylas in 1983 and subsequent excavation (PRN 101753), immediately to the north-east of the castle, revealed a large ditch which was estimated to be 23m wide and 4m deep. It is presumed to be part of the Edwardian borough defences on the south-east side of the medieval town.

Town plan

The 13th-century grid plan of the Edwardian town is still represented by the High Street (reflecting the short axis) and the two roads crossing it, Castle and Church Streets to the south-west and Parliament and Gwindy Streets to the north-east. These, however, are not necessarily their original names. An extent of 1428 mentioned only High Street and Castle Street. Other names such as *Peperstrete* and *Pyloristrete* have long been abandoned.

Town features

Excavations in 1969-74 (101950) in the vicinity of Ysgol y Castell revealed the remains of a stone-built Norman church, medieval houses and other timber buildings, defensive ditches (both Norman and Edwardian) and pottery kilns. The church, on the east side of the footpath from Hylas Lane to Twt Hill, was a simple structure of mortared local limestone, around 27m long with a nave 9m wide. Documentary records indicate that the church survived until relocated by Edward I between 1284 and 1301. In the adjacent burial ground, a large number of graves were identified, two coins of William Rufus (1092-1095) associated with one burial providing the earliest dating evidence.

Further archaeological work in this area in 2001 revealed a steep sided ditch, a cobbled surface, middens and industrial residues, which were considered to be of medieval date, and certainly no later than the 16th century when the land reverted to agricultural use. The ditch appeared substantial and may be postulated as a continuation of a ditch observed in 1969. In subsequent years a 13th-century pottery kiln was uncovered, together with other possible associated remains such as ditches, gullies, floor surfaces, middens, pottery and pits.

In 2010 on land immediately to the east of the church, linear features lying at right angles to High Street and roughly parallel to Church Street were uncovered. These were tentatively interpreted as the remains of burgage plot boundaries relating to the Edwardian Borough. The features produced a range of faunal remains and pottery of late 15th- and 16th-century date together with industrial waste. Pit-like features containing late medieval pottery were also recorded.

A hospital probably run by the knights of St John is documented prior to 1281, and may be what was referred to by Edward Lhuyd as a hospital. It has been linked to Spital Cottage, where in 1699 the land here was known as Spital Land; there is no archaeological evidence to support this link.

Ffynnon-y-castell (PRN 101572) reputedly located near the castle, is a spring mentioned by Lhuyd in 1699, used for drinking water in the 19th century.

An old stone cross (103606), probably a hiring cross for labourers, formerly stood near the junction of Church Street and the High Street. The site is now within the garden of a cottage.

The course of the Clwyd would originally have flowed against the western side of the outer ward, although today the channel is 70m further to the west. The Edwardian port was linked

to the castle, being integrated with the moat (83514). The Edwardian dock (83514) is now silted and no longer reached by high tides.

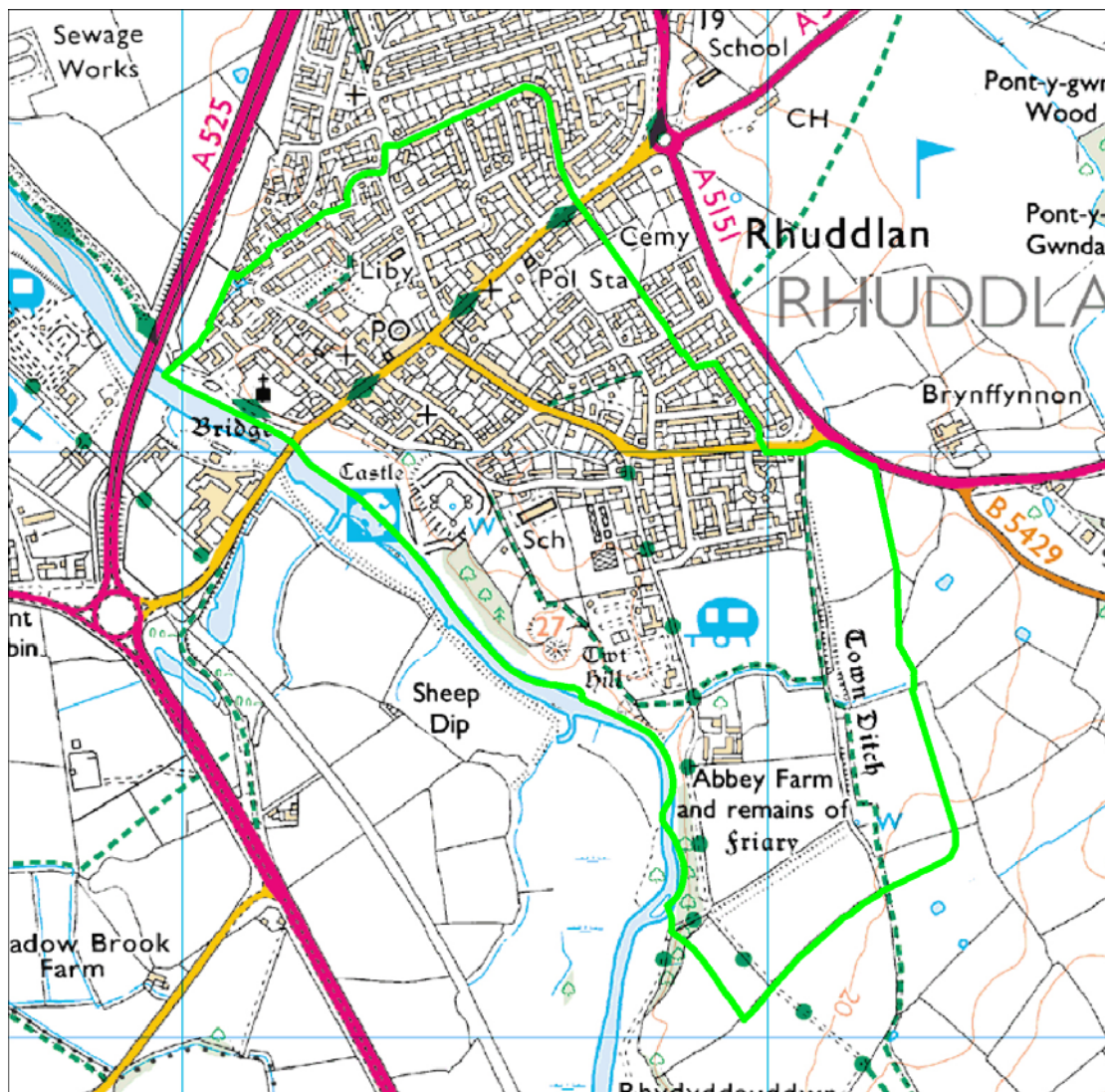
Land use

Excavations at Fairmead in the 1980s (17596), beyond the Edwardian borough defences, exposed a series of shallow ditches, probably field or plot boundaries and perhaps of medieval date.

Excavations in 1978 at Hendre (102570) to the east of the castle and also beyond the Edwardian borough defences failed to find any trace of the medieval hospital suspected at the site, but did uncover a kiln structure (17961), probably in use between 1680-1720.

Industry

Much of Rhuddlan's industry was located on the opposite (west) side of the river Clwyd - this included an iron foundry and tannery which were in existence in the 19th century.



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