

## **Presteigne**

SO 31426439  
16190

### ***Introduction***

Presteigne is positioned on the south bank of the River Lugg which at this point is the boundary between England and Wales. Converging on this from the west is a lesser watercourse, the Clatter Brook. The spur between the two watercourses drops gradually and its tip, isolated by a dry valley, is surmounted by the castle earthworks. The town lies below, on ground that shelves gently to the river. Knighton is 9km to the north, Kington in Herefordshire about 8km to the south.

This brief report examines Presteigne'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](http://www.archwilio.org.uk)).

### ***History of development***

The earliest form of the name is *Presthemed* in 1137-9, and seems to mean 'the border meadow of the priests'. By 1378/9 this had become *Prestende* and in 1545 the more modern-sounding *Presteyne*. The Welsh name is Llanandras, first encountered in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and by the late 1530s John Leland was using the name *Llanandrew*.

Presteigne developed into a town in the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, though there is some circumstantial evidence of a small community here in the second quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century for a vill is mentioned in a document known as the Herefordshire Domesday which was compiled later in the century. It has also been posited that an earlier settlement, perhaps Saxon, may have developed closer to the river in the vicinity of the church. Given that this is the only church in Radnorshire with indisputable late Saxon architectural remains, this seems entirely plausible. However, the district suffered badly at the hands of Gruffyd ap Llywelyn in 1052, and the settlement's devastation could be the reason why it did not appear in the first Domesday survey in 1086.

A grant of a weekly market and annual fair was obtained by the lord of the area, William fitz Warin, in 1225 and by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century there were more than 70 taxpayers. References to burgages proliferate in contemporary records yet no burghal charter from the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century has been discovered.

The castle at Presteigne lay on the west side of the town, but its date of origin remains unknown. It was captured by Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in 1262 but then disappears from the written record.



*Presteigne town, photo 04-C-0169, © CPAT, 2011*

In the later Middle Ages Presteigne may have declined, if only temporarily. During the 15<sup>th</sup> century it seems to have been little more than a village and the market was discontinued. Later in the century, due to the patronage of Richard Martin, the Bishop of St Davids and a native of the town, it recovered and the market was revived. It gained a charter in 1482.

The central urban area was burned by Glyndwr in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, but by the end of the century it had recovered and was effectively the chief town in the region. It was an assize town from the 16<sup>th</sup> century until the 20<sup>th</sup> century and Leland noted that it held an important market for corn.

The Elizabethan era witnessed the emergence of woollen manufacture here. A grammar school - John Beddoes School - was founded by a cloth-merchant in 1565. Saxton claimed in

1575 that 'for beautiful building it is the best in the shire, a town of Commerce', and others including Camden and Speed also admired it, the former stating that it had 'grown now to be so great a mercate towne and fair withall, that at this day it dammereth and dimmeth the light in some sort of Radnor', the latter that 'Prestayn for beautiful buildings is the best in this Shire, a town of Commerce, wonderfully frequented, and that very lately'.

The town grew throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the woollen industry expanded. Despite a major fire in 1681 which reputedly destroyed over 70 houses and the school, it continued to expand up until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, but with the decline in the woollen industry the population went into a gradual decline.

### *The heritage to 1750*

St Andrew's Church (322; Grade II\* listing) in architectural terms is considered to be the finest church in Radnorshire (Haslam): an early 14<sup>th</sup>-century nave and aisles, and a chancel enlarged or rebuilt in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century. Traces of 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup>-century Saxon stonework survives in the north aisle, Norman (Romanesque) features elsewhere. There is a possible Romanesque relief of St Andrew, some 15<sup>th</sup>-century stained glass pieces, a font from the previous century, and an interesting range of monuments, the earliest of which is a coffin lid of c.1240.

The shaft of the churchyard cross (323; Grade II listing) is set at the south entrance to the churchyard. The churchyard itself (PAR 16307) is sub-rectangular and has possibly been enlarged on the south-east side by the incorporation of a strip of land taken from Broad Street. Its original shape cannot now be determined



*The Warden castle at Presteigne, photo 04-C-0169, © CPAT, 2011*

The date at which Warden Castle (318; SAM Rd052) was thrown up has not been established. It is a ringwork with a possible bailey, but the castle is believed to have been levelled by Llywelyn ap Gruffydd in 1262 and further mutilated by landscaping in the nineteenth century. It crowns the spur just to the west of the built-up area, overlooking the medieval town.

There can be little doubt that the regular pattern of streets to the south-west of the church - Broad Street, High Street and St David's Street - represent a 13<sup>th</sup>-century urban plantation, with High Street representing the main axis and various other streets leading off it at right-angles. Certainly some of the lanes running parallel to Broad Street such as Harper's Lane and the interestingly named Back Lane had early housing on them (see below) and on the strength of this could be part of the medieval planned settlement. With its distinctive width, Broad Street must have been the site for the medieval market. A 13<sup>th</sup>-century deed mentions burgage plots in 'Great Street' (Broad Street) and the 'King's Highway' (High Street). This may mean that the earlier settlement lay closer to the church and river: Church Street would be a possibility.

The extent of the medieval town has not been established. Evaluation high up Scottleton Street in 2001 uncovered a late medieval building which appears to have been a smithy demonstrating the spread of buildings more than 300m from the crossroads at the centre of the town. Work on open ground opposite the church encountered well-preserved medieval building foundations and burnt layers.

The market cross (320) has gone but its site is signalled by a modern wall plaque.

The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales have mapped the position of 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>-century houses in the town and revealed that they are concentrated in Broad Street and Hereford Street; the absence of early houses in High Street and the south side of St David's Street has been taken as an indicator of the fire of 1681. The Radnorshire Arms is considered to mark the northern limits of the fire.

Tan House in Broad Street, though rebuilt, has been tree-ring dated to 1436, the Old Bridge Inn (now Ford View) to the north of the church is 16<sup>th</sup>-century; Well House (30260) has a medieval cross-wing and Whitehall is considered the best preserved of the box-framed hall-and-crosswing houses with a felling date of 1463 for some of its timbers. The Old Rectory Barn contains trusses re-used from a medieval building, perhaps the rectory itself. These are only selected examples and for more information the reader is referred to Richard Suggett's excellent monograph, *Houses and History in the March of Wales. Radnorshire 1400-1800*, which was published in 2005. The period from c.1590 to c.1680 marks the high point in timber-framed building work in the town though there is structural evidence, albeit sparse, of earlier work. The Radnorshire Arms Hotel (321) is a timber-framed building, carrying a date of 1616 on its porch. It was a private house until it opened as an inn in 1792. Alterations and additions were made in c.1875. There are many other pre-18<sup>th</sup>-century buildings in the town. No 42 High Street (30350) is classed as a late medieval T-plan house with later additions; the Corner Shop (30363) in High Street as 16<sup>th</sup>-century; and Nos 4 to 6 Scottleton Street (30382) were originally one, a cruck-framed town house with a two-bayed hall of 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup>-century origin. The Duke's Arms (30292) is originally 16<sup>th</sup> century but has been mostly rebuilt in stone and brick and the facade is 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Originating in the late 16<sup>th</sup>/early 17<sup>th</sup> century are several houses in Broad Street: No 9, with its 18<sup>th</sup>-century rear extension, and the adjoining White House (30254) which together formed a cruck-framed hall with a box-framed cross-wing, No 13 (30258), No 14 (30259); the Old Rectory (30261), and Ford View (30265); in Hereford Street, No 44 and 45 (30315) and Harford House (30322); in High Street, No 47 (30355); and The Manor House (30371) in St David's Street.

Seventeenth-century houses in Broad Street include Nos 11 and 12 Broad Street (30256) and perhaps the Tan House (30267), Ivy House (30273), No 1 Church View (30274), the cruck-framed Nos 1-3 Oak Villas (30281) and Hafod (30289). 17th-century buildings elsewhere in town include Nos 1 & 2 Harper's Lane (30304), the Farmers Arms (30306), Nos 2-4 (30307-

30308), Nos 46 and 47 (30317), and Millfield (30323) all in Hereford Street; Nos 2 and 3 (30328), No 5 (30311) which includes some 16<sup>th</sup>-century timber work, Nos 6, 7, 8 and 9 (30332, 30334 & 30335), the last of these included a highly decorated re-used 16<sup>th</sup>-century truss and a wall painting no earlier than the late 18th century though the building is 17<sup>th</sup>-century; Nos 12 and 13 (30337), No 32 (30343), No 38 (30347), The Castle (30349), Nos 43 to 46 (30351, 30352 & 30354), London Cottage (30362) all in High Street. The Old Mill (30364) in Mill Lane is classed as 17<sup>th</sup>-century, as is St David's House (30370) in St David's Street; perhaps Bell House (30381) and Nos 1-3 (30386) in Scotleton Street; and Green End House (30390) in Slough Road.

Beyond the main streets of Presteigne other buildings of early date existed. On Back Lane off Hereford Street, a late 17<sup>th</sup>-century timber-framed house of five bays with collared trusses was demolished in 1980. And Myrtle Cottage on Harper's Lane is also considered to be of 17<sup>th</sup>-century date.

Most of these buildings carry a Grade II listing, but some such as the Old Rectory and the Manor House are sufficiently important to warrant Grade II\*. Overall Presteigne has the richest heritage of historic vernacular buildings in the county.

The stone bridge (30266) over the Lugg at the east end of the town dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Leland in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century also recorded a stone bridge here but this was destroyed.

The county historian Jonathan Williams in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century mentioned a deserted village site at Clatterbrook (4134), which is the stream running through Presteigne's modern southern periphery. This is equated with the *Clatretune* of Domesday Book, but no traces of this have been recognised on the ground.



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