

Castle Caereinion

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Introduction

Castle Caereinion lies on the B4385 some 6km west of Welshpool. The village occupies a flat saddle of ground between relatively steep-sided hills that rise to east and west. Northwards, the ground drops away gently to a valley carrying a small tributary of the Banwy, though both this river and Afon Rhiw to the south are several kilometres distant.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Castle Caereinion 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.

Until relatively recently the dwellings grouped around the churchyard represented the core of the village. A major new development, the Maesgarmon estate to the east has now altered the layout of the settlement here.

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).

History of development

Recorded as *Castell* in 1254, and as *castellum Kereiniaun* in 1309, the second element refers to the administrative division or commote of Caereinion, but the *Castell* is more of a mystery, and experts have pointed out that early place-names could refer to another castle site elsewhere in the commote.

There is no unequivocal evidence for an early medieval foundation here, yet the dedication is suggestive.

Documentary records state that Madawc, prince of Powys built a castle in Caereinion in 1156. It has been argued, quite understandably, that the mound in the churchyard (see below) is the earthwork castle referred to, yet this remains to be proved, even if Cathcart King, one of the leading experts on castles in his day accepted its authenticity. Records indicate that the castle itself was destroyed in 1167 and it is not clear whether it was subsequently refurbished.

The medieval development of Castle Caereinion is not chronicled, and St Garmon's was not an important ecclesiastical centre, being classed as a chapel in 1254, although it subsequently emerged as the centre of an ecclesiastical parish. Small amounts of medieval pottery were recovered in an evaluation on the east side of the road opposite the church but this material was not associated with any structural features.

An estate map of 1766 reveals that there has been a fundamental alteration in the layout of the village since that date. The only dwellings in the village were cottages on the west side of the churchyard and some of these fronted on to a large, open triangular area, perhaps best interpreted as a green, to the north of the church (and now occupied by School House). The main road through the village ran round the west side of the churchyard and then bifurcated, one branch running eastwards, the present Cwm Lane, the other striking off in a south-westerly direction. The present B4385 around the east side of the churchyard and down to Berriew did not exist in the middle of the 18th century. How much credence we should attach to the surveyor's depiction of a smaller churchyard which would not have incorporated Twmpath Garmon (see below) is unclear. Quillets or strip fields were in evidence in Maes Llan to the west of the church, indicative of medieval open-field farming, and this in turn points to the presence of a medieval community in some form.



Castle Caereinion, photo 89-c-0083, © CPAT, 2012

The heritage to 1750

The church of St Garmon (7649) was completely rebuilt in 1866 with additions in 1874. Its predecessor was of 15th century date. Some of the fittings from the earlier church survive, mostly of 18th century date.

The mound (104), in the corner of the churchyard has been classed as a medieval castle mound or motte, and is also known as Twmpath Garmon. It survives in a somewhat mutilated condition. It has been suggested that its accompanying bailey can be detected in the outline of the churchyard perimeter on the north-west and north-east, and less convincingly in the presence four small mounds on the south-west and south-east. On this premise St Garmon's church was originally established within the castle defences, a phenomenon not unknown elsewhere in the UK. However, an alternative interpretation of the tump is as a 'preaching mound' associated with St Garmon (cf Llanfechain in Montgomeryshire; Llanarmon Dyffryn Ceiriog in Wrexham County Borough Council) has also been advanced in the past, and the most recently expressed view by an expert is that the mound does not appear motte-like, a contention strengthened by an evaluation in 2002 which failed to reveal a surrounding ditch. A further suggestion is that it no more than spoil dumped from adjacent road works.

Brookside and Orchard Cottage (7651) to the west of the church have a Grade II listing. It appears that together with Ivy House which is of 18th century date, these buildings are depicted on the 1766 estate map.

Ty'n Llan (7652) has a datestone of 1786, but fabric which is of an earlier century, while Orchard Cottage (7651) is 17th century. The only other listed building of note is the Red Lion Inn (7653), considered to be later 18th century.



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