

Welshpool

SJ 2243 0755
15760

Introduction

Welshpool functions as a nodal point on the edge of the Severn Valley with three main roads intersecting here including two trunk roads, the A483 and the A458. Set on the western slopes of the valley above the Severn flood plain at the point where the Nant-y-caws Brook (also known as the Lledan Brook) converges on the river, the historic core of Welshpool is enveloped by 19th and 20th century housing on the west, south and north, and by a lower-lying industrial zone to the east.

This brief report examines Welshpool'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 only as an indicative guide to the historic settlement. The continuous line defining the historic core provides 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).

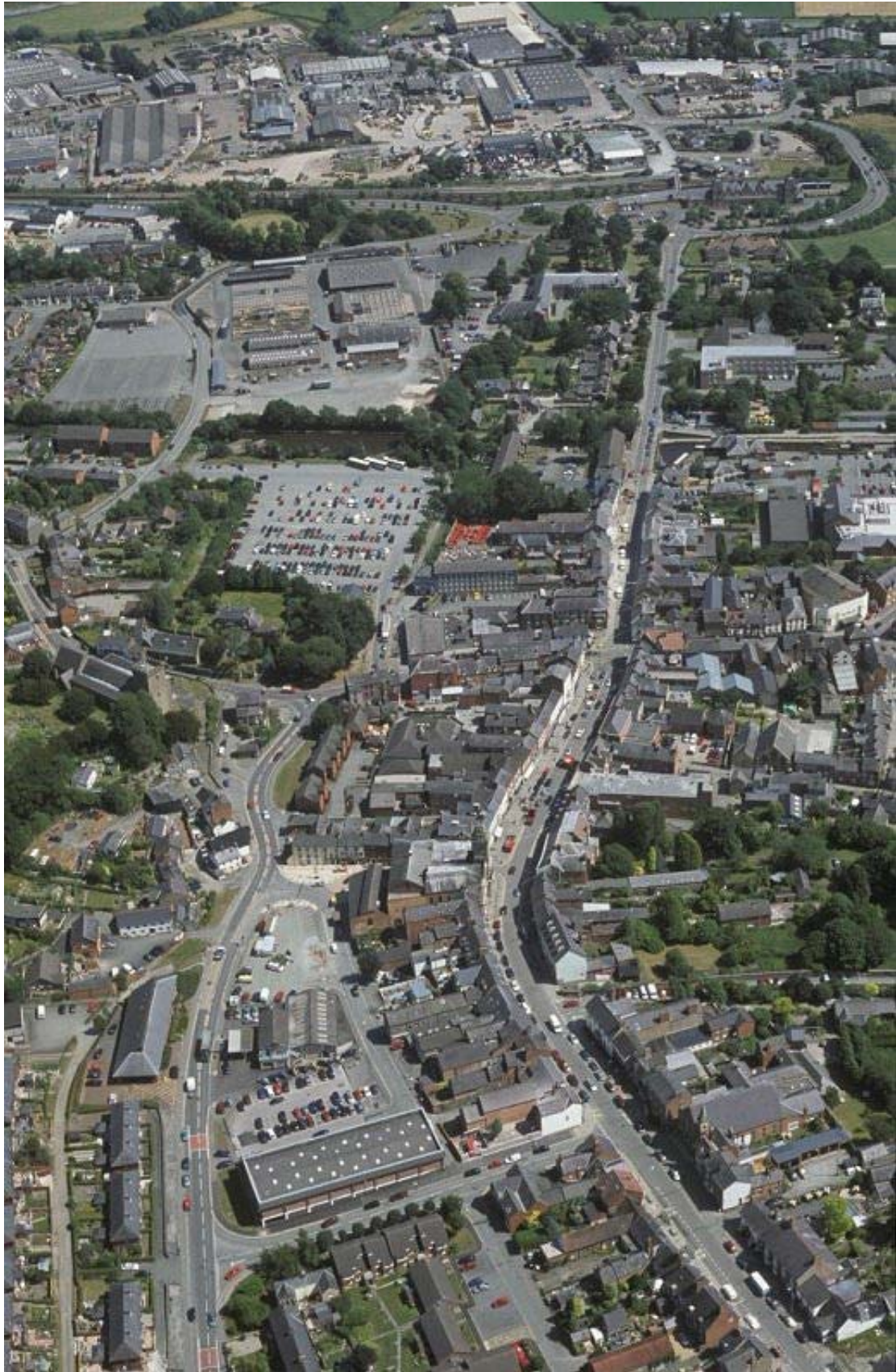
History of development

Welshpool is said to have been the location of two churches founded by St Cynfelyn and his brother Llywelyn in the 6th century. The precise position and form of these churches and any accompanying settlement remains unknown, but one of these churches should probably be equated with the 'Old Church' (see below). That being the case, the second could well have been on the site of the present parish church whose spur location hint at early medieval origins.

The parish church lies on the opposite side of the valley of the Lledan Brook from the later borough (see below), from which it can be intuited that it was already in existence when the new town was laid out. Confirmation comes from Bleaze's map of 1629 which has the term 'Welshe towne' printed adjacent to the church, and from this we can contend that the earliest settlement at Welshpool should be in the Salop Road/Mill Lane area, though excavations along Mill Lane in recent years and revealed no traces of early medieval activity and little of medieval date.

The earliest reference to the settlement is as *yr trallwng* in about the year 1100. The church at Trallŷg occurs in the Norwich Taxation of 1254 and *y trallwn* appears as late as c.1566. *Pole* and *la Pole* are first recorded in 1196 and 1197 respectively, but it was 1478 before *Walshepole* shows in documents and almost another century for *Welshe Poole*. The leading place-name authorities translate Welshpool as 'the muddy pool' and rather than associating it with Llyn Du in Powis Castle Park which has been traditional, they feel it may have been some wet place along the lower course of the Lledan Brook. However, such is the

prominence given to 'The Poole' by Bleaze on his map of Welshpool in 1629, that the traditional view is probably correct. Pool is seen as a loose translation of *trallwng*.



Welshpool town centre, photo 03-c-0448, © CPAT, 2012

The present town of Welshpool resulted from a deliberate policy by Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn, Prince of Powys, to establish a new borough. As such, this was a planned town which owed little to the existing settlement on the other side of the Lledan Brook. The burgesses received a foundation charter in the 1240s and a market was recorded there in 1252. Forty years later there were 106 taxpayers in the town, a total which had risen to 225 by 1322. The new town adopted a basically linear plan, centred on High Street and Broad Street, with some development also along Church Street, Berriew Street and Severn Street.

The Glyndwr rebellion and the general decline apparent in many Welsh border towns in the 15th and 16th centuries, seem to have had a limited effect on Welshpool, to judge from the picture of the town on an estate map of 1629. Leland thought it the best market in Powysland in the 1530s, replacing Montgomery as the regional centre because of its better location, and we could probably assume steady growth through the Tudor and Jacobean periods.

The growth of the flannel industry during the late 18th century added fresh impetus to the development of the town, though it has been argued that it failed to become a predominant urban focus in Wales because of competition from towns higher up the Severn Valley. The construction of the Montgomeryshire Canal at the same time added to its importance, and the railway arrived in 1862.

The heritage to 1750

The church of St Mary (5504) has a complicated architectural history. Its tower is 13th century, except for the 15th or 16th century belfry stage while the rest of the building appears to have been added to or modified from the 14th century to the 19th century. It was then restored in 1856 and 1870 with further work in the 20th century. Inside not a great deal has survived from the medieval era. Its 14th century font is now in the local museum, and an early 16th century triptych has been removed for security reasons. There is a large 17th century communion table, the Royal Arms of Charles II, two chandeliers of 1776, and various monuments and brasses that span the late 16th century through to the 19th century.

The churchyard is a rectangular area on today's map. Bleaze's map of 1629 implies that earlier there was an oval churchyard, but this could be little more than a stylistic device employed by the cartographer for mid-18th century maps show little that supports a different layout.

The 'Old Church' (4438) lay at the junction of Mill Lane with Salop Road. Traditionally associated with Llywelyn's church, the building that was still standing as a ruin in the 18th century was erected as late as 1587, and then badly damaged by fire in 1659. However, Capel Sainte Llew'n standing south of the present church and Salop Road was referred to in a will of 1545 seemingly confirming that the church of 1587 was a rebuilding. Part of its associated graveyard with seventeen burials was identified during rescue excavations in 1986-7, their radiocarbon dates centering on the 13th-14th centuries. Further work in 1997 revealed the possible position of Capel Llewelyn in a garden at the rear of 37 Salop Road. Mill Lane probably followed the western edge of the graveyard.

Domen Gastell (120; SAM Mont019) is a well-preserved motte, but the bailey has suffered from re-use as a bowling green. It may have been constructed as early as 1111, although the earliest possible documentary reference to it dates from 1196. There has been some suggestion that a settlement developed around the castle, but no firm evidence has yet been found to substantiate what is little more than a hypothesis based on a reference to houses surrounding a castle at Welshpool being levelled for defensive purposes.

The layout of the town is essentially linear with the main axis, Broad Street lying on the southern edge of the Lledan Valley. By 1629, both the town hall and the market house as well as the market cross were located in the centre of this thoroughfare. Several lanes run off

Broad Street to north and south with a road intersection (now Berriew Street and Church Street) at its eastern end. Narrow burgage plots remain clearly defined on Broad Street and Berriew Street, and it is evident from the estate map of 1629 that at that time (and by implication in previous centuries) Broad Street was the main focus. A feature of this urban pattern is the numerous narrow alleys, many of them named, which ran off the main street.

A considerable number of the buildings in the centre of the town have been listed. There is nothing to be gained from cataloguing all of these, but it is worth drawing attention to the earlier buildings from before 1700. Nos 5 and 6 Mount Street (30699 & 30700) are thought to be 16th century timber-framed cottages, and 13 High Street (30663) and the rear wing of 12-13 Broad Street (30627) is believed to be 16th century. The Mermaid (30684), 11 High Street (30670), 19 High Street (30677) and no.38 Mount Street (30707) are attributed to the late 16th century. From around 1600 are 8 and 10 High Street (30667 & 42448), the Talbot Inn (30674). Of early 17th century origin are Oldford Cottage (30711), no.1 Mount Street (30697) and 1 High Street (30661). Amongst the 17th century houses are 34-35 Mount Street (42458), 24-26 High Street (42453), 36 High Street (30689), 5 Hall Street (30654). 5-6 High Street (30664) has been attributed to the late 17th century. It is no coincidence that almost all of these properties lie away from the commercial centre of Welshpool around the crossroads where the demands for refurbishment are always likely to have been greater. In this respect the uncovering from beneath its later veneer of a timber-framed first-floor hall-house lying back from Broad Street in Hopkin's Passage is instructive.

The cock-pit (30708) was probably built in the mid 18th century, possibly as part of the Castle Inn, and remained in use until cock-fighting was made illegal in 1849. It is a rare building type and the only example in Wales to survive on its original site

The agricultural dimension to medieval and early post-medieval Welshpool is largely lost. Open fields once covered a substantial area of lower ground between the town and the Severn and are depicted as such on an estate map of 1663 but these have been almost completely erased by the modern industrial development. Depicted on the map was 'the Ould Field' near the later farm of Henfaes which is probably the earliest area of cultivation. Nevertheless, ridge and furrow cultivation has been recognised in various places, both in Powis Park and in the hills surrounding Welshpool and it may be that some of this is of medieval origin, though perhaps more likely to be later.



Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey® on behalf of HMSO. © Crown copyright and database right 2009. All rights reserved. Welsh Assembly Government. Licence number 100017916.