MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENT IN WALES

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Wales is essentially a mountainous country with a substantial land-mass above the 300 metre contour. This terrain of slates and metamorphic rocks was only suitable for pastoral farming. A costal belt varying from 32 km wide to less than 2 km extends around the whole of Wales from the mouth of the river Wye in the south to the Dee estuary in the north. The island of Anglesey lies within the coastal zone which was normally devoted to arable regimes for cereal production. A middle zone on the flanks of the broad inland valleys of the east flowing Dee, Wye and Severn and of those rivers flowing into the seas surrounding Wales, such as the Conwy and the Mawddach were subject to a mixed farming economy, dependent on the prevailing climate and the economic imperatives. It is this middle zone which experienced the greatest pressure for change in the period ca. 400-1600. In general the clearance of forest, the draining of marshes, as in the Glaslyn, the exploitation of peat beds and the occasional cultivation of outfields were the main changes, though there are also botanical indicators of climatic amelioration 900-1100 and subsequent deterioration 1300-1500.

Early Medieval

The major concerns in the study of medieval settlement have been to reconcile the evidence furnished by documents, by geography and by archaeology. The documentary evidence for the post-Roman period is largely the information from legal codes attributed to Hywel Dda (d. ca. 950). These legislate for various domestic circumstances and assign compensation within a barter economy. There is considerable emphasis on timber building construction, on the houses of the prince's court and on agrarian practices, mentioning ploughs and widths of plough furrows. Horse rearing, cattle herds and sheep flocks were major concerns; their meat, horns, hides and fleeces were essentials within the economy.

The geographical evidence is two-fold: it is partly the use of place names to identify the date and nature of settlement; it is partly the examination of the composition and sustenance of multiple estates. The pioneering work of Professor Glanville Jones (*Jones 1972*; *1989*) has disentangled these relationships from clues in late medieval documents. Through discussion of soil suites and settlement siting he has (over the past 30 years) reconstructed the early medieval land conditions in the immediate post-Roman centuries. These are attractive and convincing hypotheses which still require confirmation by archaeological excavation.

The archaeological evidence has been coloured by two interpretative scenarios. On the one hand there has been a desire to confirm the theoretical model provided by the Welsh laws (*cyfraith Hywel*) and to identify the hiererchy of settlements postulated within the system of multiple estates e.g. court (*llys*) and steward's town (*maerdref*), as at Llystin, Abergwyngregin and Rhosyr in the research programme now led by the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust. On the other hand there has been a pragmatic approach, seeking to understand the variety of isolated monuments, such as the ogam inscribed stone at Penbryn in relation to the later church and settlement by using comparable work on standing stones such as Gogerddan, and to interpret the pattern of visible homesteads within the post-Roman successor kingdoms in terms that make sense throughout late Celtic Iron Age peoples in Britain before the Anglo-Saxon expansion affected the eastern borders of Wales. There has also been a need to recognise the Celtic migrations around the Irish Sea which resulted in the colonisation of Brittany and the transfer of the Desi tribe from Leinster to occupy forts or 'raths' in south-west Wales (*Dark 1994*).

In terms of hierarchy it seems clear that the ruling classes often lived in or had access to long-established hill forts and the newly created craggy outposts, as at Garn Boduan, Degannwy or Dinas Emrys. Only at Llangorse in Brycheiniog is the elite centre a crannog of Irish pattern. Here tribute and gift exchange stimulated the economy, smiths and bards were patronised and religious leaders sponsored or received. There is no evidence that the Roman network of small towns or regional *oppida* continued to operate as urban centres though a few sites such as Caerwent, Caernarvon/Llanbeblig and Caergybi (Holyhead) might be occupied for religious purposes. However the continuity of villa estates into early medieval land units (mentioned in the Llancarfan and Llandaf charters) has not been proved archaeologically, though the land utilisation potential, as at Pentерry, makes this an attractive possibility and would provide an efficient balance of resources, as Wendy Davies has argued (*Davies 1979*; *1994*).

By contrast settlement in isolated farmsteads was likely to be in rectangular or subrectangular 'long huts' rather than in Romano-British round huts; these huts were ridge-roofed and timber-framed set on stone footings, usually with the main axis along the hill slope. Some would be accompanied by walled paddocks or stock yards, and might contain circular pigsties with corbelled roofs. It is assumed that the pattern of small rectangular 'Celtic' fields would have continued with little alteration. However the main sustenance of the upland settlements would have been a subsistence economy based on pastoral grazing. Despite recent fieldwork by Peter Crew this still needs to be confirmed more convincingly by reasonably closely dated excavation evidence (*Edwards - Lane 1988*).

Although the eastern borders of Wales were subjected to Anglo-Saxon influences and occasional invasion between 800 and 1050, the physical demarcation given by Offa's Dyke (built 780-790) was generally accepted as a legal land-barrier and, apart from the burh of Cledemutha (Rhuddlan at the mouth of the river Clwyd), there was no substantial or permanent settlement west of the Dyke. Indeed Welsh-speaking communities continued to occupy their settlements in undulating hill country around Oswestry in north Shropshire and in Archenfield of south-west Herefordshire. The Vikings raided many coastal areas and monasteries, but no certain proof of settlement has yet been found, although it seems most likely at Glyn, Llanbedrgoch (*Redknap 1994*). Deposits of coin hoards and hack silver only indicate troubled conditions. The prevalence of Norse place names for peninsulas and islands does raise the problem of verbal transmission, presumably through traders from Ireland and Viking Chester.

Later Medieval

The major change to the character of late medieval settlement came with the Norman Conquest. This was a process extending over two centuries from 1080. The first wave of invasion effectively held the low-lying coastlands along the northern shore of the Severn estuary from the Wye at Chepstow to St. Davids Head. At the same time the eastern frontier south of the Severn at Montgomery was pushed westwards to create the lordships of Builth, Brecon and Radnor. Within these newly settled territories the Normans created nucleated rural settlements and urban centres.

The towns were sometimes based on pre-existing taxation points or monasteries, as at Caermarthen and Newport in Gwent (*Soulsby 1983*; *Butler 1979*; *1985*). Nearly all the towns were centred upon a new castle which might be named from its founding lord and else from the territorial unit he controlled, as at New Radnor. The town would be laid out on a simple grid plan of streets, following as regular a pattern as the terrain allowed. Although the castle site, the framework of streets and the location of churches has usually survived with little alteration, the market space has often been encroached upon and the houses have all been replaced. The best example of urban excavation has been the work on the deserted area of the Norman town of Rhuddlan (*Quinnell - Blockley 1993*): this uncovered houses, smithies and a small church. Work on Chepstow (*Shoesmith 1991*), Newport in Dyfed (*Murphy 1994*) and Usk (*Courtney 1994*) has explored some of the houses and burgage plots, showing evidence for traders and craftsmen but with a strong agricultural participation. All the towns had common fields surrounding them, though of widely varying extent, as at Tenby in Dyfed. The introduction of coinage with the mints at Cardiff, Swansea and St. Davids was a Norman innovation though relatively short-lived as the monarchy centralised the issuing of silver pennies. The parallel introduction of pottery (*Papazian - Campbell 1992*) also changed the cultural patterns of the native Welsh, who thereby had access to a greater range of imports. It also marked a shift from a pattern of mutual obligation based on personal service and tribute to a market economy protected by charters and re-inforced by tolls and a formalised tithe system.

The location of castles was often strategic, used both by the Normans and (in imitation) by the Welsh, as at the ringwork of Tomen y Rhodwydd at the head of the pass from the vale of Clwyd to the Dee valley. Elsewhere the Normans planted mottes to control the princely courts (or '*llysoedd*'), as at Aber in Gwynedd, and the pattern emerges in the late 11th century of the co-incidence of motte and commote. This pattern was followed by Owain Gwynedd in Arlechwedd Uchaf at Dolwyddelan motte. The Normans often founded settlements and churches alongside their mottes.

The survey and investigation of the new Norman and Flemish settlements has so far been slow work, with the doctoral theses by *Courtney* (*1983*) and *Kissock* (*1990*). Only the excavation of the deserted village of Cosmeston near Cardiff has been on a scale that has enabled variations in the social use of space and the development of the economy to be perceived. Elsewhere small hamlets or individual houses have been tackled, mainly in Glamorgan, as at Highlight (*Butler 1988*; *1991*). No specifically Flemish settlement has been examined, though whether it would be recognisable from its constructional details or its artefactual assemblage is uncertain. In some cases the Flemings who had retreated from the dangers of coastal inundation in 11th-century Flanders were subjected to coastal sand-dune movement throughout the later middle ages. Further east colonisation in the Wentloog levels was a phenomenon of the central middle ages until halted by the disastrous flood of 1610, an area studied by Simon Rippon. Throughout the coastlands of south Wales and that part of the Cheshire plain which lay in north-east Wales the incoming gentry or *advenae* were defending or distinguishing their homesteads by constructing moated enclosures (*Spurgeon 1981*) as at Ty Mawr "Great House" at Llandeiniolen.

By contrast those areas under Welsh rulers or under Welsh laws ('The Welshry') were characterised by non-nucleated or dispersed settlements e.g. the church of a dispersed settlement Mwnt on the frontiers of an English enclave at Cardigan with its berewick (Welsh *Verwig*) (*Butler 1987*). Either these settlements were set in girdle fashion around the available arable at the hillside junction, with the ploughland situated below and the rough grazing above; otherwise they were set as small hamlets (*trefi*) growing from an initial forest clearance or from a summer dairy farm (*hafod* or *lluest*). The most instructive of recent excavations has been at Graeanog, where four rectangular houses were set on a small terrace in the shelter of a low hill in coastal Arfon. The material culture and the carbon-14 dating of charcoal indicated a twelfth-century date; different huts were used for distinct purposes - dwelling, barn, byre and stable (*Kelly 1982*). Elsewhere excavation and field survey has been small in scale, usually only a single hut excavated or a limited district surveyed (*Butler 1971*; *Robinson 1982*). The major exceptions to this have been the extensive survey work of the Royal Commission in Caernarvonshire and Glamorgan (*R.C.A.M. 1964*; *1982*), and the research programmes in the Moelwyns and the Rhinogs of southern Snowdonia by Peter Crew and by Richard Kelly.

New settlements, or at any rate new churches, may mark the draining of the marshes, sands and mud flats as at Llanfihangel y traethau, a colony of the 1180s at the mouth of the Dwyrid, or a new fortress Castell y bere to mark Llywelyn ap Iorwerth's conquest of a new territory Ystumanner in the 1220s with its upland grazing and the draining of the Dysynni valley. In Powys a new settlement and new chapel Betws Gwerful Goch suggests woodland clearance in the 13th century. Yet there is a continuing need for environmental work in the lake sediments and upland bogs to understand vegetation patterns and identify the changes caused by land clearance.

Although many field surveys have given some attention to the ancillary storage buildings, the animal pens and drying kilns, it needs a deeper integration with estate documents, as *Colin Thomas* (*1970*; *1975*; *1992*) has done, to understand fully the farming regimes. In the specialised case of the Cistercian granges one needs to correlate the land charters and disputes with the mapping of Cistercian resources, shown by the research of *David Williams* (*1990*). Only Merthyrgeryn, a lowland grange of Tintern in south-east Wales, has had exploratory excavation to match the documentary scrutiny (*Parkes - Webster 1974*; *Williams 1990*). The land clearance of the upland valleys was facilitated by new granges, such as a suggestively named Hen Hafod of Strata Florida (now entirely ploughed out). The foundation of Cistercian abbeys after 1200 does not seem to have disrupted any existing settlements to create a Cistercian desert. When Aberconwy moved to Maenan in 1283 the pattern of early management is retained with valley floor warplands, low ground girdle settlement at Maes-y-hendre with its barley field, a primary farm of 1600 on the first shelf, the upland pasture of *ffridd* and the moorland pools and grazing, all providing a balanced economy for the medieval desmesne estate (*Butler 1981*).

The Edwardian Conquest

The conquest of north-east Wales by Edward I between 1277 and 1294 introduced a number of 'bastides' or walled towns laid out on a regular grid plan, usually located as an integral part of a castle's defences acting as its outermost bailey (*Beresford 1967*). There has been some excavation in recent years, but it has usually been limited to one or two burgage plots. In Caernarvon, Conwy and Beaumaris a few houses still survive of late medieval date. However the fullest information about the appearance and materials of the later medieval housing comes from the rural halls, tower houses and chamber blocks of the incipient gentry; one such house is Hafotty, its name 'summer dairy farm' betraying its transient origins which its late medieval rebuilding fully conceals despite its position on the edge of the Malldraeth (*Smith 1975*, 18-139). Any excavation at such houses would only provide the basic dimensions from the low stone footings and would give little idea of the social pretensions and artistic sophistication of those structures which they supported. That substantial houses could be built emphasises the accumulation of wealth based on service to the crown and upon exploitation of the English tax system. One house that very nearly became a total loss was Plas Uchaf, built by one of the barons of Edeyrnion. His township lands had meadow at the confluence 'Cymmer' of the Dee and the Alyn, had middle ground as arable around the 14th century house, and detached upland grazing high on the Berwyns. The house must be seen in its rural settlement context, including its participation in transhumance farming.

There were few compensating benefits for the lower classes. The search for the 'peasant house' has until recently been hampered by preconceptions fostered by the 18th-century English gentry travellers. House-and-byre homesteads or long houses (*tai hirion*) in which humans and cattle were sheltered under the same roof were recorded as a regional phenomenon in the last century. However it is still unresolved whether these were the final primitive survivors of a once universal housing arrangement or whether there was a vernacular threshold where the peasantry normally shared their dwellings with their animals while the gentry and yeomanry (*uchelwyr*) maintained a social and economic distinction, housing their animals separately. The latter class also made greater use of pigeons and fish within their diet, evidenced by dovecotes and ponds. Rabbits may also have been part of the diet, though the warrens were created predominantly for the fur trade (*Austin 1988*, 149-56).

Conclusion

The concentration upon the physical appearance and internal arrangements of the dwelling houses has often been at the expense of evaluating their setting, the stock processing, the mills, the craft workshops, the mineral extractions and the field systems. Fortunately the research climate is changing and the tacit assumptions about medieval settlement in Wales are now being more vigorously challenged.

Abbreviations:

Arch. Camb.	Archaeologia Cambrensis
B.A.R.	British Archaeological Reports
B.B.C.S.	Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies
R.C.A.M.	Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments

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