CAERNARVON

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CAERNARVON

Caernarvon is situated in North Wales on the southern shore of the Menai Strait, which separates that county from the island of Anglesey, and at the point where two small rivers, the Saint and the Cadnant drain into the Strait. It is a position of considerable strategic significance.1 North-West Wales is made up of two major relief elements, the great mountain mass of Snowdonia and the low plateaux of Anglesey. These have played complementary parts in the economy of the region. Anglesey, the Welsh Môn, was the great corn growing area; for this island is incomparably more fertile in corn than any other part of Wales, from whence arose the British proverb, Môn Mam Cymru, Mona Mother of Wales; and when the crops have been defective in all other parts of the country, this island, from the richness of its soil and abundant produce, has been able to supply all Wales.' So wrote Gildas in his commentary on his journey through Wales with Archbishop Baldwin in 1188, and further he makes the contrast with Snowdonia, the major pastoral area, maintaining that 'as Mona could supply corn for all the inhabitants of Wales, so could the mountains of Eryri (Snowdonia) afford sufficient pasture for all the herds, if collected together'.

But Snowdonia was also 'the stronghold of Gwynedd' (i.e. North-West Wales), for the extensive area of fragmented upland provided a great defensive rampart which extended from Conway in the east to Yr Eifl in the west and ensured the security of the good lands of Môn. But the Menai Strait does not divide lowland from upland, for this divide occurs some four miles south-east of the Strait, leaving a narrow lowland fringe bordering Snowdonia and lying on the Caernarvonshire side. This is the area that is known as Arfon (Ar Môn), or the land over against Môn, and which forms the second element in the name of the town. This rich and diversified country was the setting for the settlement.

The mountains of Snowdonia are traversed by a number of passes. One of these follows the upper Conway river and leads over a low watershed (1,100 ft.) into the headwaters of the Nant Peris and hence by the Pass of Llanberis debouches on to the Arfon lowland. Another from the south follows the River Glaslyn and the Pass of Aberglaslyn and a watershed at some 650 feet in the valley of the Gwyrfai, whilst a third winds along the western edge of the mountains by the valley of the Dwyfach. These three routes unite at Caernarvon which consequently dominates much of Snowdonia and at the same time controls Arfon and the Strait. In all senses, therefore, Caernarfon is a focal point, between highland and lowland, between land and sea routes, between two contrasting economies.

The site of the town is a very distinctive peninsula, which was literally 'almost an island', lying between the two rivers, the Conway and the Seiont, as it has been incorrectly called. The chief topographical feature which dominates Caernarfon is Twr Hill, which forms the southern end of a ridge, one hundred feet in height trending north-eastwards away from the town. This is of granite material intruded into Precambrian rocks while to the south these are succeeded by Ordovician shales. These softer rocks form a low platform into which the rivers have cut fairly deep valleys. This has resulted in the creation of the low, level, semi-circular peninsula, which was almost encircled by water and easily adapted as the site for a castle and borough.

Roman Segontium

The general site of the future borough was so important that invaders of North Wales were attracted to it from early times. On the nearby Tŵr Hill (200 ft.), the highest of a series of hills, are the remains of what may be a prehistoric promontory fort.2 The major use of the area, however, dates from the Roman period.

During the Roman occupation of North Wales strategic considerations dictated the siting of a Roman fort in the years a.d. 75 to 80 in this key position, commanding the Menai Strait and the approach to Anglesey. Furthermore, there were valuable copper deposits twenty miles away on Great Orme's Head. The occupying army, faced with the task of holding down the remnants of the North Welsh Ordovices after the bitter warfare waged for possession of their mountain homeland and of the reduction of Anglesey, was deployed in cordons of forts strung along strategically planned roads. By means of these, any part of the inhospitable tribal area could be quickly penetrated or sealed off as occasion demanded—an admirable illustration of the conventional military principle, summarized by Tacitus as civitates puressilis castellisque circumdatae: "tribes enclosed by garrisons and forts".

The fort at Caernarfon, spacious enough for a large auxiliary regiment, formed with Carmarthen (Moridunum) the coastal section of this network of garrisons. Its name Segontium appears in the Antonine Itinerary and as Segvntivm in the Ravenna Cosmography.3 The original fort, standing on Llanbedrig Hill—150 feet above sea level and a mile away from the later borough—was constructed in timber about A.D. 75. It was later rebuilt in stone. It had an earthen...
rampart, outside of which were two ditches. Segontium was occupied certainly down to the early years of the second century, possibly to the end of it; early in the third century there was rebuilding and the fort was re-occupied in strength. At this time it may have been the administrative centre for a large part of North Wales, as well as its principal defence against sea-borne invasion. It was connected with the base at Chester by a road. A defended stores-base (Hen Wliais) on the river bank was probably erected in this later period and no doubt indicates the continuing importance of local mineral deposits. The fort appears to have lain empty in the first half of the fourth century, to have been reoccupied for the third time after A.D. 360, and then to have been at least partially abandoned at least up to 383 when Magnus Maximus, peculiarly associated with the Caernarvon region, marched the garrison of the fort for his continental venture. It is by no means certain that this ended its military history. Nevertheless, with Maximus, Segontium is lost to ancient history and its interest lies in the part it played in later Welsh legends.

The fort was called Caer Saint by the Welsh and figures in the legend of Maccsen Wledig (the Emperor Maximus), his Welsh wife Elen or Helena and the death of their son Constantine, who became confused with the family of Constantine the Great. In the Historia Brittonum composed in the late 8th or early 9th century Nennius wrote: ‘The fifth (of the Roman rulers in Britain) was Constantinus, son of Constantinus the Great, and he died there, and his tomb is shown outside the city which is called Càir Segient .’ Later, in about 1150, Geoffrey of Monmouth in the Vita Merlīni, twice alludes to ‘urbs Segeni’ and this has been identified as the ‘Caer Segient’ of Nennius. To the late 12th century belongs the ‘Dream of Maccsen Wledig’ in which, in order to claim the bride he sees in a dream, Maximus comes to ‘Caer Aver Saint’.

It is highly probable that the area of the fort, if not the fort itself was settled by the Welsh soon after the Roman withdrawal. The parish church of Llanbeblig stands on the site of a Roman cemetery, 200 yards to the south-east of Segontium. It has been suggested that it originated in a monastic cell in the late 6th century when a monastery of St. Peblig (Publicus), one of the so-called Celtic saints, for it was not uncommon for such cells to be established on Roman sites. He was by tradition a son of Maccsen Wledig and Elen, and this is the only church dedicated to him.

The Norman and the Welsh Town

It is possible that the later Mercian invasions of North Wales led to settlement in the area, but certainty is only reached in the late 11th century with the Norman infiltrations from their base at Chester. Hugh of Avranches, Earl of Chester and the Conqueror’s nephew, appreciating the obvious advantages of the peninsular site between the two rivers, later used by Edward I, built himself a motte-and-bailey castle, and in all probability gave burghal privileges to Norman settlers who would provision it. The knights, bowmen, and other soldiers that he collected in Arfon are mentioned in the life of Gruffydd ap Cynan. Norman supremacy was quickly ended and the Welsh were in possession again by 1115. Their princes made Earl Hugh’s castle a royal residence and the centre of the administration of Gwynedd. This was the ‘Kairarvon’ (Caernarvon of Arvon) referred to by Giraldus Cambrensis, writing about 1188, and Llywelyn the Great, granting a charter to the canons of Penmon in Anglesey, dates the deed from ‘Kaerinarfon’ in 1221. Thereafter the name occurs in a variety of spellings, all being attempts at rendering the Welsh name. There is evidence that the place remained in use down to the Conquest by Edward I; in 1272, for instance, a quitclaim made there was witnessed by the ‘Sneschal of Wales’, and in the same year Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, executed a deed granting the church of St. Peblig to the monastery of Aberconway. Caernarvon was in fact already a small trading centre. Trade along the North Welsh coast was active from the mid-12th century, and the customs of the port as well as the profits of the burghal lands are listed among the accounts of the ‘maenor’ (the demesne land) in 1284. Further, the liberty of the new Edwardian borough undoubtedly perpetuated the bounds of the old ‘maenor’ and in both cases the parish church was the church of St. Peblig. Llywelyn like his Norman contemporaries was fully aware of the value of encouraging urban centres. Caernarvon in some respects was thus, like Nevin and Llanvaes, a typical Welsh trading town of the pre-Conquest period, but it was also something more—it was the heir to an imperial tradition.

The English Borough

By 1277 Edward I had decided to undertake the formal settlement of his Welsh problem by the conquest of Gwynedd, the north-western region of Wales. The death of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd (Llywelyn Y Llyw Olaf) in battle removed the last obstacle and as part of the process of pacification the English king began the building of a series of castles in north and mid-Wales. Caernarvon was among the eight fortresses which were ‘the premium that Edward paid to insure his Welsh conquests against the fire of rebellion’. It was also one of the five which were integrated with fortified towns18 and were in the direct tradition of the European bastides, of which indeed they are classic

19 E. L. Loomes discusses in detail the problem of Segontium, Caer Sant, and Sisandun in Wales and the Arthurian Legend, chap. 1.
20 J. G. Edwards, ‘Edward I’s Castle-Building in Wales’ in Proceedings of the British Academy, xxxii, 15-81. The eight fortresses and five fortified towns (in italics) were Aberystwyth, Bangor, Flint, Rhuddlan, Caernarvon, Holyhead, and Beaumaris.

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examples. The special treatment accorded Caernarvon by Edward I has recently been brilliantly emphasised. It has been shown that he was not insensitive to its claims 'to be an immemorial repository of imperial power', and had the body of Magnus Maximus, 'father of the noble Emperor Constantine', which was alleged to have been found at Caernarvon in 1283, reburied in the church. Furthermore, he appears to have deliberately had the castle built on the model of the Theodosian wall of Constantinople, the firstConstantine's own city. As a part of his policy of consolidating Welsh national feeling, it is likely that plans were made for an early royal visit to this castle rather than elsewhere, even though temporary timber buildings for the king and queen had to be rushed up. They arrived at Caernarvon in July, 1283, and they were there again in April, 1284, when the first English prince of Wales was born. In October, Edward I was there to make the formal presentation of the borough charter.

Work seems to have begun on the site immediately after occupation, probably in early June, 1283. The town with its walls, gates, and bridge, the quay, which was indispensable for the import of timber, stone, and other material, were planned as one operation and work on them proceeded simultaneously. Something of the scale of the undertaking can be gauged by the need to bring in skilled workers from almost every shire in England. Forty carpenters, for instance, came from Nottingham in 1284. Furthermore, it has been estimated that by 1292, when the work was substantially completed, a sum of £9,700 had been spent, the equivalent of about £1,000,000 of modern money. Improvements continued until about 1330, concluding with the west wall of the town bordering the Menai Strait. In a very few years the ground-plan of intra-mural Caernarvon, which was to remain unaltered, had been established, and the castle, the greatest in Wales, had been erected. It was to withstand with ease the attacks of Owen Glyndyr in 1401 and the two sieges by him and the French in 1403-4. The 17th-century John Taylor admirably summed up his impression of the unity of plan of the town and castle combined: 'I have seen many gallant fabrics and fortifications, but for compactness and completeness . . . I never yet saw a parallel. And it is by Art and Nature so fitted and seated, that it stands impregnable'.

The site chosen for the castle was partly that of the earlier Norman one, the motte of which lay in the centre of the upper ward. Both were built on the Ordovician shales and overlooked the sea on the west and the Saint on the south. The difficulties of the site and the buildings already there explain the comparative lack of symmetry in the new castle's plan. One of the first tasks in 1284 had been the digging of the 'new moat 'between the castle and the town—'new' in contradistinction to the old moat of the Welsh castle. By November, 1285, work on the walls and the removal of the houses of the Welsh town was well advanced—over £1,800 had been spent on them—and the process of laying out the streets had probably been completed by 1287. The walls and the castle were seriously damaged in the rebellion of 1294 and had to be restored. The gravity of the situation is reflected in the energy displayed. In that year 288 men were employed, besides 200 masons and stonemasons. When completed the town walls enclosed the peninsula between the two rivers and thus took on the form of a half circle with the straight diameter along the Menai Strait and the circumference following a line determined by the rivers. The walls were flanked by eight round towers, one named 'Penne', at an average interval of seventy yards and were broken by 'two gatehouses consisting of pairs of similar towers with closed backs projecting inwards'. These gateways lay at the eastern and western ends of the main street, High Street. The East Gate (Porth Mawr), Great Gate, or Exchequer Gate was the main entrance to the town. The West Gate (Porth yr Aur), overlooking the strait, was also known as the Golden Gate, a name which may echo the more famous Golden Gate of Constantinople. There were three other medieval entrances. A small gate, Green Gate, opened on to the Prince's Garden, which was itself on the site of the Norman bailey, and two posterns gave access to the waterfront, one in the south-west known as the Water Gate, which was mentioned as new in 1305-6, and possibly one in the north-west which was early embodied in St. Mary's Church. The total walled area was ten and a half acres and the castle included a further three acres.

Owing to the controls of site it was not possible to divide the intramural area into a rigid rectangular pattern as at Flint, nevertheless a close approximation was achieved by the creation of eight blocks, the central four being clearly rectangular while the two blocks to the west were slightly smaller and the two to the east were shaped to the demands of the circular wall. The nominal size of the burgages at Caernarvon was eighty feet long by sixty feet broad. If such plots be fitted regularly into the available space there could be some seventy burgages. In the first rental of 1298 a total of sixty-two holdings is listed of which fifty-six were whole and six half; and up to 1356 the number of burgages varied between sixty-one and sixty-three. As was to be expected from the very purpose of the town, it was stipulated by royal ordinance that each arretted burgage plot should be built upon; in case of default it reverted to the Crown. Burgages that were unallotted for want of tenants remained in the King's hands and were devoted to his use. For example, one was used as a store yard for the royal workers there. To encourage building twelve years' rent was remitted. The eight blocks were broken into two groups of four to north and south of the main east-west street, High Street. This was the major traffic street, connecting the restricted points of entry by the major gates. The other
streets which broke up the blocks and ran north to south were solely residential streets and the passages through the walls to which they lead are of modern date.⁴⁸ Edwardian towns in France invariably had a market-place in the centre of the town: Caernarvon likewise had a market (though a small one) next to the shambles and Guildhall at the junction of High Street and Market Street. The main one was outside the walls where there was more space. By an agreement of 1298 each burgess with a burgage in the town was to have a place (placae) with a frontage of thirty feet, round this market-place, in which he could build a shop for saleable goods. Foreign merchants might also have places, but all bakers and brewers were to brew within the walls; all granges and granaries were also to be inside the town. A Toll Booth on the bridge outside the East Gate had been erected before 1311. It is probable that houses were soon built in this area and that they are referred to in an account of the revolt of Owen Glyndŵr in 1402, when it was recorded that the barbican of the town gate had been seriously damaged and that sixty houses in the suburbs had been demolished.⁴⁹

Because of the existing church of St. Peblig, it was not until 1307 that Henry of Ellerton, deputy master of the works, obtained a licence to build a chantry chapel on his burgage and to endow a chaplain. The chapel of St. Mary, which became known as the garrison chapel, was a chapel of ease to the mother church at Llanbedrog. It was built against the north-western corner of the town wall so that access to the three-quarter drum tower there could only be obtained through the church. It was probably completed by 1316 and is inaccurately shown on Speed's map as standing free of the wall.⁵⁰

The building of the town involved considerable modification of the lower course of the Cadnant. The river was dammed and a pool, called the King's Mill Pool with a swim's nest in the middle, was formed in the incised valley, work beginning on it in 1285.⁵¹ Speed's plan of 1610 depicts a five-arched bridge with three separate streams issuing from the pool and uniting beyond the bridge. He names the bridge 'Pount Prith', perhaps a version of Pwnt Pridd, 'Earth dam'. There were two mills, one next to the bridge, the other (mentioned in 1304-5) lower down at the distributary confluence near to the East Gate. These remained the property of the Crown and were constantly repaired at the royal expense.⁵² The lower estuarine part of the Cadnant was crossed by a second bridge which linked the East Gate and the walled town with the eastern bank of the river. A stone bridge of six arches was built about 1301-2 and was defended by an outer gateway by 1310.⁵³ The bridge like the walls, quay and haven was a royal responsibility. In 1319 the burgesses are found petitioning the Crown for its repair and extensive repairs were carried out in 1320. Speed's map and eighteenth-century engravings show the gate with a pair of rectangular towers and the bridge with a similar smaller structure.⁵⁴

The town was primarily an instrument of military and political subjugation and sea access was vital for the provision of supplies; accordingly a series of quays was constructed along the sea front. A wharf ran along the tidal inlet of the Cadnant, and extensive quays lay to the north and south of the West or Water Gate, although the section to the south only is so named by Speed. This latter part was entered by a small arched gateway⁵⁵ in a wall adjoining the Eagle Tower of the castle. Finally, it is worth emphasizing that the harbour formed by the Saint, though it is of little importance for modern shipping, nevertheless was the only one between Conway on the north-east and Pwllheli on the south-west which could be used by any but the smallest of medieval craft.⁵⁶ This too was kept in repair by the Crown.

All these features taken together present an admirable example of the Edwardian bastide constructed on an open site and on a unified pattern.

By the Statute of Rhuddlan (1284), Caernarvon became the administrative and judicial capital of an area known as the Principality of North Wales, which included the three shires of Anglesey, Caernarvonshire, and Merioneth. The town, therefore, had a number of special public buildings connected with its new position. There was the Exchequer over the East Gate, hence its variant name Exchequer Gate, and other adjoining Exchequer buildings, which seem to have included the Chancery.⁵⁷ The royal court of justice—known as the King's court—was situated north of the castle moat and close to the western wall of the town.⁵⁸ The chief officers of the Principality, the Justiciar and the Chamberlain or Treasurer, were lodged when in residence at the Castle. The Eagle Tower, a magnificent erection, was planned to house the first Constable of the castle, who was in addition the first Justiciar. It was 'designed on a scale appropriate to his vice-regal rank'.⁵⁹ The prison was at one time apparently in another tower of the castle, but later the 'debtor's' and 'felons' prisons were said to be on either side of the Great Gate of the castle.⁶⁰ The Chamberlain kept his records in the Treasury or Record Tower. When his office had come to an end and the tower itself was ruinous, the records of the three shires were reported to be 'so decayed, perished, and defaced' that they were removed to a place in the town where, it seems, they fared little better.⁶¹

Besides the official buildings of the Principality the town, as a free borough, had its own court and gaol, and as the shire town it was also the seat of the Shire Hall, where a monthly court was kept and the sessions of the justices of
assize. This last building was mentioned in a grant, made to John Gruffythe, of the office of Marshal and Keeper of the inn of the justices called 'le Shire House' within the town of Caernarvon. A survey of 1595, moreover, refers to the 'ruinous decay of the shire houses, commonly called the Justice Houses, with other lodgings in and about the same'.

The borough's foundation charter of 1284 gave it extensive privileges, including complete freedom from the sheriff's interference, the right to a Guild Merchant, freedom from toll and other dues, and control over a wide market area, yet the town's early economic development, as was the case with so many plantation boroughs, was severely limited. The introduction of a market economy based on the town, in place of the older Welsh systems, was a part of Edward's plan for the economic conquest of North Wales and an essential feature of his new boroughs. The town charters designated these urban spheres of influence in terms of the pre-Norman Welsh cymdau (s. cwrmud) or commotes. These were minor territorial divisions of the 'gward' or the 'state' in which the ruler had a court-house and which served as the centre of local administration. The market area of Caernarvon comprised the cymdau of Is Gwyrfa and Uwch Gwyrfa (i.e. Lower and Upper Gwyrfa), which are divided by the River Gwyrfa that rises in Llyn Cwellyn and flows to the Menai Strait to the south-west of the town. It is an area which includes much upland and poor coastal marshland and certainly could not support extensive trade in the prevailing economic, social, and political conditions. All but local trade was monopolized by Chester, and of the North Wales boroughs, Beaumaris was commercially the most important. In consequence, it can be said that a striking feature of the port of Caernarvon during the Middle Ages was its political importance and that its commercial activity was incalculable.

Every effort, however, was made to give the town a monopoly of what local trade there was. In 1313 it was ordered that no one within eight miles of Caernarvon was to buy or sell wares except in the borough under pain of forfeiture, and there is evidence that on at least one occasion the town enforced its rights against the tenants of the powerful Bishop of Bangor. As an English outpost trade was rendered more difficult for the burgesses from time to time by the enmity of the Welsh. In 1345 they complained to the king of the damage and destruction done and that the Welsh were seeking to destroy them. They declared that they could not go anywhere for fear of death and threatened that unless they received help they would have to desert the king's towns and castles and leave the country. Further disasters followed the Black Death, which undoubtedly caused a great decline in demand. In the 1360s the burgesses complained that 200 men or more had withdrawn from their market, possibly the result of an organized Welsh boycott, and subsequently a royal charter was issued enforcing the old ordinance of 1313.

There is no evidence of any developed industry. The records indicate that the craftsmen were for the most part engaged in supplying the essential needs of the town in food, clothing, and housing. A few mercers occur and there is some evidence that tanning and cloth-making, along with fishing, were the most important pursuits. There were, for instance, three weirs from early times; a fourth was constructed in 1385, and a fifth in 1454. The account of the losses of nineteen burgesses during Owain Glyndŵr's raid of 1462 included 1,000 beasts, which suggests that there was a local supply of the raw material for the tanners and clothmakers, as well as for the exportation of wool. Furthermore, from early times one of the town streets was known as Skinners Lane. Markets were held weekly and after 1352 there were four annual fairs which merchants of Chester are known to have attended.

As indicated above, the burgesses supplemented their small-scale trade by the produce of their fields. The rural character of the borough is in fact pronounced throughout the Middle Ages. The earliest extant rental of 1298 shows that the majority had holdings of land varying from five to forty acres, though some large allotments of sixty to seventy acres were held by a few important persons, such as the king's old nurse, the clerk of the works, and the rector. The acreage rented was 1,030 acres, but by 1339 the burgesses were holding 1,464 acres—a sign of the economy being so damaged that £100 borrowed by the burgesses was not paid back until 1352. More, from early times one of the town streets was known as Skinners Lane. Markets were held weekly and after 1352 there were four annual fairs which merchants of Chester are known to have attended.

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All these points emphasize the lack of a developed economic base, a universal feature of these planted towns.

The Borough after 1485

Revolutionary changes followed the accession of Henry Tudor. By his charter of 1507 Welsh and English were put on an equality for the first time, and Welsh yeomen began to settle in the town despite the efforts of the burgesses to stop this movement. They petitioned Wolsey in 1529 about Welsh infiltration into municipal offices, and followed this up with protests against certain burgesses of the gentry class demising land to Welsh 'strangers' contrary to the borough's charter and ancient usage.
With the Act of Union of 1536 began the period of government by the County Justices of the Peace and the gentry. From now on the 'borough gentry', such as Sir John Puleston, began to build their mansions (e.g. Plas Puleston) within the walls, and the town, deprived of its old political and military importance was glad to shelter under the protection of the neighbouring gentry. It still flourished not only by merchandise, but because 'the king's exchequer, chancery, common law courts for all North Wales were there continually residing', as Sir John Wynne wrote. 'By this civility and learning flourished... so as they were called the lawyers of Caernarvon, the merchants of Beaumaris, and the gentlemen of Conway.

Nevertheless, the Exchequer and the law courts of the Principality gradually diminished in importance and at the end of the 16th century Camden wrote of them as things of the past. The county court, however, remained a valuable asset. When a great session was held at Conway there was an immediate outcry in 1561 from Caernarvon. The change of name from Shire Hall to County Hall after 1536 is perhaps an indication of its changed status. Caernarvon, furthermore, was now represented in Parliament and this in time gave it a new importance. It encouraged the growth in numbers of non-resident burgesses who acquired burgess-ship solely for political reasons and eventually outnumbered resident burgesses.

Apart from these governmental functions, the town's main function was as a market centre for Uwch Gwyrfai, but its trade by land can hardly have been more than local, since the town was at a distance from active commercial centres of any great size and lacked developed industries of its own. The absence of any extensive trading interest is confirmed by an analysis of the Port Books and Customs Accounts for the second half of the 16th century. There were virtually no records for any long distance trade, in sharp contrast to the records for Beaumaris which dominated not only trade with Europe but also with Ireland, though the bulk of trade with that country was through the port of Milford. Coastal trading dominated and this was primarily concerned with the import of necessities from Chester in the north and a range of southern ports, which included as well as Milford in South Wales, Bristol, Barnstaple, and Bideford in south-west England. The port, however, was in sufficiently active use to impress Leland, who describes the 'praty shippis' coming up to the Castle side of the town. The main commodities were wheat, barley, barley and oat malt, sugar, vinegar, salt, pepper, wine, and iron. The sole exports were wool and woolen cloth together with the products of coastal cattle rearing—hides and tanned leather, butter, and cheese.

Examination of the Burgess Rolls confirms a lack of any distinctive industrial development. A run of these only begins in 1575, and a tabulation of resident burgesses admitted between 1575 and 1834 reveals no elements of specialization. Distributive and retail trades dominate, together with personal services and building and construction. The coastal trade noted above is reflected in eighteen 'mariners' admitted; the export of hides and leather is paralleled by the recording of nine tanners and two skinners.

From Speed's map of 1610 and other evidence it is possible to get a picture of the lay-out of the extra-mural area before the 19th-century development. The main controls were the physical ones of the two rivers and the Cadnant bridges. The 'Pount Prith' of Speed, the line of the mill pool dam, fixed the line of what was later named Bridge Street. The town bridge from the East Gate produced the line of Eastgate Street. Bridge Street was extended northwards into what Speed termed Llanvore Lane (i.e. Llanher Lane), derived from the name of the adjoining parish Llanfair-is-Gaer. By the 18th century this had taken on the more obvious name of Bangor Street. The skeletal structure of the extra-mural area was completed by two open areas. The first of these The Green (Y Maes Glas), apparently part of the bailey of the 11th-century castle, was bordered by ditches and raised, and was directly under the control of the Queen's Gate of the castle. It became the main market-place of the town. The second open area lay at the point where Eastgate Street joined Bridge Street and Bangor Street. Here Speed marked 'Oatmeal Market', called 'Turf Square' (Cwsv-y-Mawn) by 1800. This name is usually derived from the fact that country women used to sell peat or turf there, and it confirms the area as a secondary market-place. It was also the site of the town pillory and stocks.

From this irregular line of development, which lay at a tangent to the curving east section of the town walls and the lowest section of the Cadnant valley, three further lines of extension were apparent by the early 17th century. The northernmost of these led to the dominating ridge of Twf Hill which gave its name to the Street. Speed calls it Tuttle Street (Twf Hill Street), and depicts its lower portion with houses built along it. The remaining two streets lay on either side of the mill pool. The one to the north of the pool was 'Pricy Suth', which seems an English attempt at Pric y Saethau or 'Stryd y Priciau Saethu', in an apparent reference to its early use for archery. The third street, south of the pool, is labelled 'Lone Pebble' by Speed, and should probably be Lon Peblig—Peblig's Street or Way as it led to the church at Llanbeibl at the far end of the street. With further road with slight extension of settlement is shown leading off to the south along the line of the present Llanberis Road.

A local map of 1776 confirms this structure and shows very little change from that of 1610. It seems, therefore, that since the late 13th century, although the outline structure of extra-mural Caernarvon came into being and was determined by clear site controls, it remains in a skeletal state until the last quarter of the 18th century.
The Borough in the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries

The economic importance of Caernarvon has been continually kept in check by the limited wealth and the thin population density of its immediate hinterland. In the later 18th century there were two new developments which ultimately transformed the medieval town. The first, and more important of these developments, was the beginning of the large-scale exploitation of the slate of Snowdonia. Until the mid-18th century quarrying had been limited and local and only after 1750 did systematic working begin. This was largely due to the enterprise and the work of Richard Pennant, the first Baron Penrhyn, who succeeded to his estates in 1765. His efforts mainly affected Bangor and his own Port Penrhyn, but his initiative sparked off general exploitation and the Dinorwig quarries, directly tributary to Caernarvon, were leased to two local lawyers in 1788. It is estimated that in 1793 nearly 250 cargoes of slate were discharged from the town’s port. As early as 1813 a railway from the Nantlle Valley quarries to Caernarvon was projected, but it was not until 1825 that the line was actually built and that Caernarvon could be said to have entered the industrial age.

The second development was the growth of Caernarvon as a resort, for this was the period when sea-bathing became fashionable and the Romantic Revival had made attractive the once ‘awful’ mountains as well as medieval ruins. A visitor of 1769 remarked that the ruins of the castle in which Edward II was born ‘must strike a considerate observer with astonishment’ and that its situation, magnificence, and strength were ‘worthy the admiration of travellers.’ By the early 19th century it was in fact generally acknowledged that ‘the salubrity of the air, the convenience of the town’s situation for sea-bathing, and the beautiful scenery in the neighbourhood’ had made it ‘the frequent resort of visitors.’ The town plan in about 1825 clearly shows the major medieval inheritance with newer features, derived from these recent functions, grafted on to it. Within the walls the medieval street lay-out remains unaltered, although the building and plot pattern after centuries of modification shows little relationship to the original burgage lots.

The area south of Church Street was built on only in the latter part of the 18th century, having been known locally as Plas Isaf Yard, but in 1823 the Earl of Uxbridge erected Public Baths together with a concert room and theatre, a fitting testimony to the development of the town as a resort. High Street was still the major shopping street, ‘the chief street of the town’, although a movement away from it was already well-established. The shambles were in this street, having replaced the old Town Hall, itself near the site of the medieval cross. Plas Mawr, off Red Lion Street, one of the major town houses, had not yet been replaced by the Corn Market, which incidentally was to preserve apparently in its dimensions those of the original burgage plots (i.e. 80 ft. x 60 ft.). At the junction of Newgate Street and Castle Ditch Street were the County Hall and the County Gaol, built in 1794. Outside the wall lay the small Customs House. The town was considerably improved during the first quarter of the 19th century by paving and lighting. Many street names were also changed at this time, probably under the influence of Nonconformity, which disapproved of names derived from the taverns of the old town: King’s Head Street became Castle Street, Red Lion Street was changed to Palace Street and Black Boy Street to Northgate Street while the former Newgate Street was dignified by the name of Shirehall Street. A major change in 1767 was the reconstruction of the old Exchequer—for two and a half centuries the centre of governmental activity in the three shires—as the new Town Hall. The hall was on the first floor and extended the whole width of Porth Mawr, including the two drum towers, on the west front. It can be seen in Rowlandson’s picture of the ‘Entrance to Caernarvon’ in 1797. A traveller’s comment was that ‘all that can be said of it is that it is convenient’. It was to be used both as a borough court and for assemblies. The new building was a necessity as the old Town Hall or Guild Hall was in ruins and as early as 1749 the Borough court was for this reason being held in the Shire or County Hall.

Outside the walls considerable modification of the Cadnant was taking place. The tidal section had been blocked off and the construction of a new harbour and slipway was being undertaken as part of a series of harbour improvements, which had started in 1793 and were extensively carried out between 1807 and 1830. Along the river banks two streets were being developed. The first was Bank Quay, which followed the line of the old town wharf and the town ditch, whilst the second was Crown Street, its parallel on the opposite bank. Mill Lane and Skinner Street preserved in their names the position of mill and tannery. The large ‘Green’, which still in the late 18th century formed by Greengate Street, Skinner Street and Maes Glas, which was apparent in the 1770s had been built along by the 19th century, as the ‘Maes Glas’ was transformed into Castle Square. Similarly the open triangular area to the south were called Pen yr Allt Street, but the largest area of new building was beginning in the quarter bounded by Maes Glas, Pool Street, and the River Saint. Here small terraced houses in rectangular blocks were being built to be a continuous extent from the new harbour and slipway in the north to Slate Quay in the south.

The three eastern extensions of the town noted in the early 17th century had been further developed. By 1820 the two southern were called Pen yr Allt Street, but the largest area of new building was beginning in the quarter bounded by Maes Glas, Pool Street, and the River Saint. Here small terraced houses in rectangular blocks were being built.
CAERNARVON

under the stimulus of the slate trade, for the population of the town increased from 4,000 to 10,000 between 1801 and 1831. Within this area the chapel formed a distinctive element; the earliest was Capel Pendref (1791) in Bangor Street, but two others were soon to be built in the developing area.\[^{93}\]

Lastly, along the Bangor Road and around Tŵr Hill were appearing the large houses of the wealthier classes. The old ‘plasau’ of intra-mural Caernarvon, built close to the centre of military and political power, were in decay or being converted to other uses; suburban extension of the best quality residential areas was in progress. Transition, deterioration, and dispersal brought into operation, even in this small town, the forces which have created the contemporary urban scene, and they provide an appropriate point at which to conclude this analysis.

\[^{93}\] For this development see a plan of the town of Caernarvon from an actual survey: John Wood 1834 in the Caernarvon County Archives. The main plan (infra) shows no developments after 1826.

In compiling the maps and plans reference has been made to documentary sources, to archaeological and other printed articles, to 18th and 19th century prints, and to the following map sources: Map of Caernarvon by John Speed, The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine, 1611; Sketch of Caernarvon Town as it was in 1569, National Library of Wales, Department of Maps and Prints; Plan of Caernarvon by Hugh Griffith, Brynodol, c. 1776, N.L.W., Miss. Langford James Deposit Collection; New and Correct English Atlas by John Cary, London, 1793; Plan of the Town and Harbour of Caernarvon, No. 1, 1802-1812, N.L.W. Department of Maps and Prints; Plan of Caernarvon Corporation, Map of Proposed Waterworks at Caernarvon 1831, Caernarvon County Archives, Official Maps and Plans Life, Gas and Water, No. 1; Plan of the Town of Caernarvon and Adjoining Lands with Springs of Water by William Jones, Land Surveyor, 1824, N.L.W., Department of Maps and Prints; Plan of the Town of Caernarvon from an Actual Survey by John Wood, 1834, Caernarvon County Archives; Ordnance Survey Plans 1:500 1st Edition 1888 and 1st Edition 1900, 25 inches to 1 mile scale; Ordnance Survey, Roman Britain series 1 inch to 10 miles scale.