

Landscape Report: Lampeter



Themed/focused around
Medieval Lampeter

By Sam Bennett

Photos credited to:

Bottom left- Britain Express and David Ross

Bottom right- Historia Normannis Lampeter on Facebook

Top left- Lampeter Teifi Trail

Top right- Tripadvisor, Turista-Inglesa

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1. Medieval Architecture/Monuments in Lampeter

1.1. Stephen's castle/Lampeter castle

One of the most significant medieval sites that still permeates the landscape of the modern town of Lampeter is the historic landmark known as Stephen's castle (also referred to as Lampeter castle). All that remains of the monument is an earthen mound (motte) which stands within the grounds of the University of Wales Trinity St David campus in Lampeter. The castle would have been built in the late 11th century during the brief Norman expansion into Wales which occurred at the same time. It was also a motte-and-bailey castle, though the bailey's location remains unknown. To add to these Norman roots the castle named as "Stephen's" seems to be a reference to a Norman lord who can also be seen intertwined with the welsh name for the town as well: "*Llanbedr Pont Steffan*" which means "*St Peter's church at Stephen's Bridge*". The origins of the castle begin between 1115-1137 under Norman rule (Murphy, 2021) before in 1137 it suffered its first destruction by the sons of Gruffudd ap Cynan who were recorded as burning the castle alongside regional fortifications in the *Brut y Tywysogyon (Chronicle of the Princes)*.

The castle was then captured by Cadell ap Gruffydd in 1146 and then once more destroyed in 1187 after Owain of Gwynedd conquered the castle. Then in 1290 King Edward I granted the site of the castle and the lordship of Caron to Geoffrey Clement.

Following the construction of St Davids College in 1822 (now the UWTSD

campus) several other earthworks surrounding the motte were demolished resulting in the motte being all that remains of the castle (Murphy, 2021). *(Pictured above in the vicinity of the UWTSD Lampeter campus credited to British Express and David Ross)*



The castle motte has also been integrated into modern Lampeter with it being in the vicinity of the UWTSD grounds and once featuring ornamental paths at one stage for students to use. However under the trust for welsh archaeology (Heneb) it is now a scheduled monument of importance in the modern day and is a key area that still affects the landscape and ties the town to its medieval past.

1.2. St Peter's Church

St Peter's Church is another example of medieval history continuing on in the town of Lampeter, although major restoration works to the site of the church took place in the Victorian era around 1870, with the majority of the medieval site having been demolished in 1838 due to deterioration (Historypoints.org, 2026). The site is listed as a grade II Victorian building in modern times due to the extensive restoration work that occurred. However it must also be recognised as a place of importance to Lampeter's Medieval history also. This is because the site of the church has played a role in a few key medieval events in the town's history. In Lampeter at the year 1188 the Archbishop of Canterbury and Gerald of Wales gave a sermon to recruit men for the third crusade, in fact many men "took the cross" in Lampeter as a result of such sermons that were conducted at the site of the church (Historypoints.org, 2026). The church's first official reference

however was in 1291 as a result of the Taxatio Ecclesiastica, which was essentially a report on the church's land/property. The modern church and its Victorian era gothic architecture (*pictured right, credited to Tripadvisor and photos gathered by*



Turista-Inglesa) is not all that

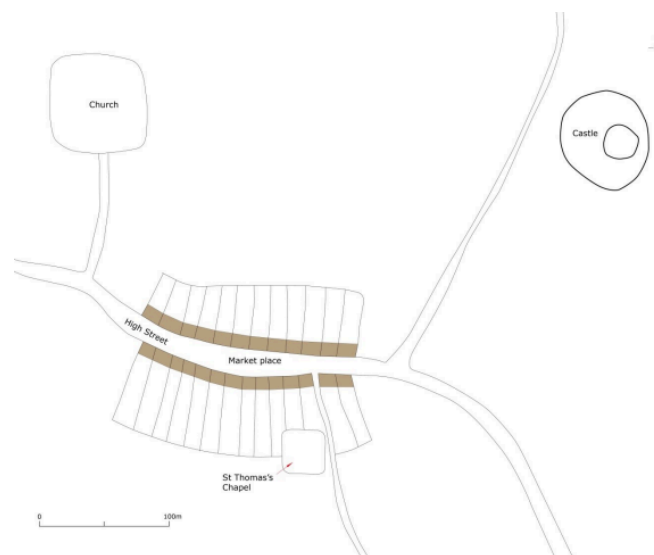
remains of the once medieval parish church, in fact alongside several stone panels that exist from the original structure the ancient yew trees that litter the area around the site are thought to be hundreds of years old and were noted by 18th century antiquarians for their large size. These yew trees are thought to be the most prominent survivors of the

medieval landscape at the site of the St Peters church rather than the church that still stands in its grounds.

2. The Medieval Borough

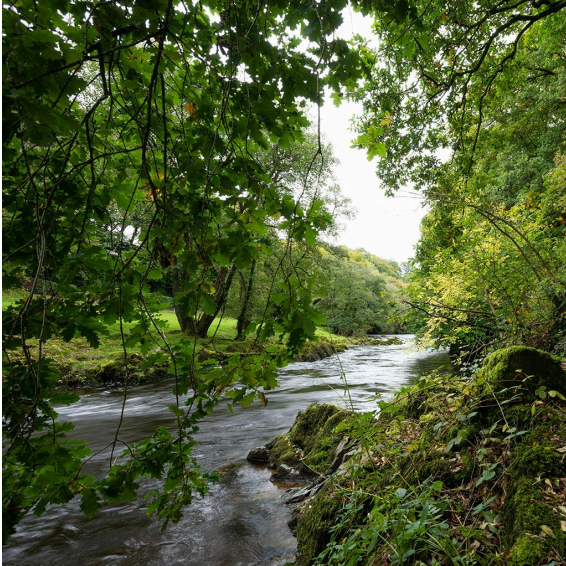
2.1. The royal charter and town layout

In 1284 Lampeter received a royal charter granted by Edward I that formalised the settlement as a borough (Murphy, 2021) and brought about many changes to the towns layout that persist today but began as a result of the medieval royal charter. It is believed that before the charter was established the settlement of Lampeter was centered around the castle, for what reason remains conjecture but it is likely that the people who began the settlement collected around the castle for safety. However, after the introduction of the royal charter the town's whole gravity shifted from the castle to a new burgeoning high street that had sprung up as a result of the charter and the subsequent grant of a weekly market and annual fair. This transfigured the landscape of the emerging settlement from one centered around Stephens castle and the protection it brought to the creation of burgage plots and a designed high street formed in a way to accommodate the changes brought on by the royal charter. In particular: Burgage plots, which are long and narrow strips of land that ran along the medieval high street that would have been rented by free citizens of a settlement (also known as “burgesses”). The linear layout of the high street with these burgage plots still remains visible to this day in the design of the high street, like footprints on the modern landscape. Below is an image of what the medieval town layout could have looked like, according to the Heneb report (Murphy, 2021)



3. *Strategic value of the medieval town*

3.1. *The Teifi crossing*



The Teifi crossing (River Teifi pictured on the left, credited to Teifi Valley Trail, 2025) held great strategic importance to the region surrounding Lampeter and was central to the development of a settlement in the area. This is because the river crossing served as a bottleneck between south and mid-Wales in the medieval period causing a notable amount of traffic and attention as it let armies bypass the natural obstacles of the region like the steep valleys and marshland like Cors

Caron (National Landscape Character NLCA40, 2014). The value of this crossing was indisposible enough that Stephen's castle was built to guard the crossing and the town of Lampeter formed around the subsequent castle thereafter. Control of Lampeter and the crossing was central to Norman forces projecting their power into Ceredigion and on the other hand allowed Welsh princes like Owain Gwynedd to stage counter offensives. Additionally the crossing made Lampeter the natural “stopping point” for both travellers and traders. This also led to its formation as a sort of logistical hub in the region which contributed to its formalisation as a borough with market rights in 1284 (Letters, 2003). To add to this notion, it is likely that the archbishop of Canterbury chose Lampeter as his preaching site for this reason in 1188, because of its ‘logistical hub’ reputation from travellers and traders it would have been a prime location for reaching lots of people to possibly join his calls for recruitment to the third crusade. Though the original bridge that gives Lampeter its Welsh namesake is lost in the modern day, the value that it brought the town in the medieval period has catalysed a lot of the development of the town that can still be seen with the market street.

4. Natural Resources and Woodlands of Medieval Lampeter

4.1. Valley side forestry

The steep valley sides of the river Teifi and the tributaries that run from it provided the medieval settlement of Lampeter with the essential forestry resources that aided the towns defence, minor industrial production in the medieval period and domestic needs. The valley floors were allocated for grazing whilst the woodlands that covered the valley sides were systematically managed even in the medieval period, in particular the “hanging” woodlands that cover the Teifi valley.



On the left of the page is an example of the “hanging” woodlands not far from Lampeter in the Longwood community woodland. Where medieval residents of Lampeter may have utilised the forest for small scale elements of industry, as described below.

Primary resources that the medieval population of Lampeter scoured from the surrounding forestry included timbers that were put to use in construction of the emerging borough. It is concluded that oak from the hanging woodlands that covered the slopes of the Teifi valley would have been primarily utilised by the medieval population to create timber-framed houses and original wooden motte-and-bailey fortifications that would have made up Stephen’s castle. Additional uses of the woodlands by the medieval populus included farming applications such as “panage” and grazing. “Panage” was provided by the valley woodlands which is where pigs that would have been kept as farming livestock could be turned out to go feed on the fallen acorns and beech mast that came from valley woodland areas such as the ones that lay around Lampeter. Furthermore, Grazing would have been provided by the steep

gorse-clad outcrops in the valley woodlands that provided rough grazing locations to sheep and cattle when the floodplain became too wet.

The medieval residents of Lampeter also took further part in shaping the landscape of the area through their management of the forestry that lay at their doorstep. A primary example of this is the management of hedgerow resources as the same ones that cover the Teifi valley today are deeply rooted in the actions of the medieval populous of communities such as Lampeter to manage so called “linear woodlands” to provide regular firewood and wood for crafting things such as tool handles. This left behind thickly hedged fields that remain to this day across the Teifi Valley.

4.2. Stone and Slate

Medieval Lampeter featured some stone and slate production similar to other medieval communities, though like those same communities Lampeter produced them on a mostly small scale local industrial action. Medieval builders often used slate and stone for rooftops and structures respectively, making small “borrow pits”/quarries along the valley sides to support these early construction efforts. They often are difficult to spot, but remain as slight “scars” on the landscape as depressions or hollows in the modern day. Additionally, they are often incredibly overgrown which is what distinguishes them from the open pasture surrounding them today.

Since Lampeter’s bedrock is made up of primarily Silurian and Ordovician mudstones, siltstones and sandstones (Davies et al., 2006) these stones were put to use typically as “rubblestone” for the footings of timber-framed buildings. They were also put to use in creating a lot of medieval period buildings such as St Peter’s church before the Victorian restoration.

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