

Great Archaeological Sites in Bridgend



4. KENFIG MEDIVAL TOWN



At the northern edge of Kenfig Burrows, near the fence that surrounds Margam steelworks, a lump of masonry pokes through the dunes. This is Kenfig castle (SS 8008 8268), all that can now be seen of the lost town of Kenfig. The archive photograph shows it as it was in the 1980s.

The castle itself was built by the Normans as part of their campaign to subdue the Glamorgan lowlands, and to defend them against any Welsh attempt to retake them. Like many castles, it was constructed alongside a river (the River Kenfig) enabling it to be supplied by boat, making use of a low knoll projecting above what was once the flat ground near the sea. Excavations in the 1920s showed that the defences of its bailey had originally been an earthen bank and timber palisade enclosing a roughly circular area. The keep, however, seems to have been built of stone from the first. It was a square tower and must have been an extremely impressive site. The bailey also contained a hall and the other buildings necessary for a castle housing a Norman lord and his garrison. Around 1300, the keep was partly rebuilt and the original bailey defences were flattened and replaced by a curtain wall with a large gatehouse on the side nearest the town.

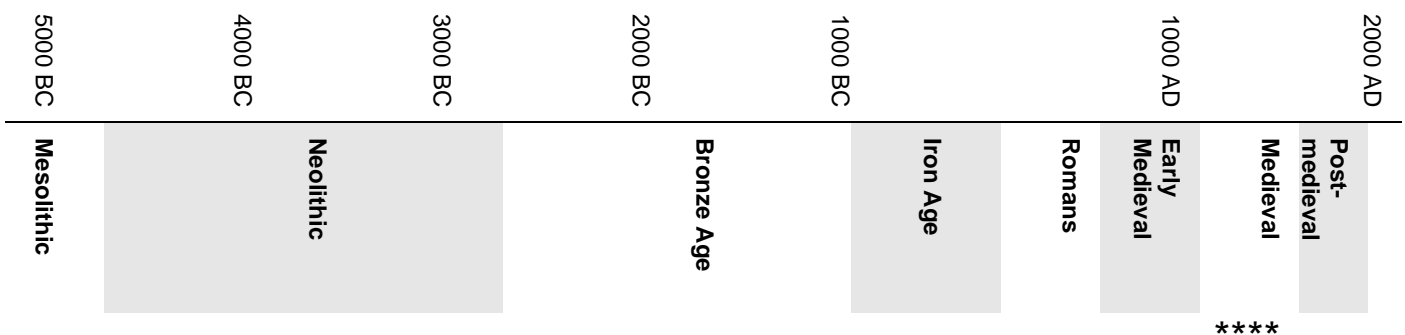
By this time, the town of Kenfig had been in existence for at least 50 years, as it was granted a charter by its overlord Earl Robert who died in 1147. The traditional site of

the town to the west of the castle is now completely covered by sand, but we know that at least part of, if not all, lay within the outer bailey. We know there was a guildhall, and a parish church dedicated to St James. Most of our information about it comes from the two rolls of Kenfig Ordnances, now in the National Library of Wales. These laid down a series of local bylaws for the inhabitants including market regulations.

So what led to the disappearance of what had earlier been a thriving town? We know that it was attacked in 1167 and again in 1183, while further extensive damage occurred during the 13th century and at the hands of Llywelyn Bren in 1315. However, it was not enemy hostility that dealt the final blow – the town prospered enough for there to be over 140 burgages in the 14th century, burgages being the individual plots held by the burgesses of the town. The problem that they now had to contend with was coastal change. As the Middle Ages went on, the low-lying part of the coast suffered increasingly from sand blowing inland and forming the burrows. Eventually it became impossible to carry on, and the townspeople moved to Pyle, where they had built a new parish church of St James by 1485.

The site is on the Kenfig Burrows nature reserve, which has its own carpark. The site of the town and remains of the castle are on the north side, near the boundary with Margam steelworks. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 170, Explorer Series sheet 166.

Timeline (the asterisk indicate the possible time-span)



You can learn more about this site, and other similar archaeological sites in Wales, by going to <https://www.archwilio.org.uk/arch/>. Please read and observe the Conditions of Use. The town of Kenfig has the (Primary Record Number) 00082m and Kenfig Castle is 00148m. You can search for other similar sites here too. You can contact us via social media or through the methods given at the bottom of the page. See more about Kenfig on our Historic Landscapes pages at http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/historic_landscape/kenfig/english/merthyr_mawr_main.html