

UNITED KINGDOM

Castles and Town Walls of King Edward in Gwynedd

Brief description

The castles of Beaumaris and Harlech (largely the work of the greatest military engineer of the time, James of St George) and the fortified complexes of Caernarfon and Conwy are located in the former principality of Gwynedd, in north Wales. These extremely well-preserved monuments are examples of the colonization and defence works carried out throughout the reign of Edward I (1272–1307) and the military architecture of the time.

1. Introduction

Year(s) of Inscription 1986

Agency responsible for site management

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2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria C (i) (iii) (iv)

Justification as provided by the State Party

The outstanding universal value of these four great castles derives from the following:

1. They form part of a programme of royal castle-building of the first magnitude, which included not only repairs or additions to existing castles, but the construction of ten new castles, the majority of them major works such as the four here nominated, and some, such as Caernarfon and Conwy, associated with substantial town fortifications.
2. They were built for Edward I, King of England, one of the great military leaders of his day.
3. Design and direction were in the hands of James of St George, the greatest military architect of the age.
4. The castles were built to a single plan, with features common to all, which was adapted by the

designer to conform to different site conditions, varying from the level ground at Beaumaris to the rocky promontory at Harlech. In every case the result was a building combining a marvellous sense of power with great beauty of line and form, perfectly attuned both to its purpose and to its natural surroundings. They are supreme examples of craftsmanship in stone, and since as royal works the contemporary documentation has been carefully preserved, the archaeological evidence is supported by historical record demonstrating, often in meticulous detail, the processes of planning and construction, and expressing the buildings concerned not only in architectural but in human terms.

All are in State Care and have been scrupulously maintained with minimal restoration, so that although many of the more ephemeral structures within the courtyards have disappeared, the main fabrics have survived substantially intact.

As such the Edwardian castles in Gwynedd are undoubtedly the finest surviving examples of late 13th century military architecture in Europe, and represent the final culmination of medieval military construction. They also provide the visible evidence, supported by much detailed documentation, for the Edwardian conquest of Wales, and hence provide an example of the framework within which, in the medieval period, a country was subjugated and absorbed.

As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

Criterion I. Beaumaris and Harlech represent a unique artistic achievement in that they combine the double-wall structure which is characteristic of late 13th-century military architecture with a highly concerted central plan and in terms of the beauty of their proportions and masonry. These are the masterpieces of James de Saint George who, in addition to being the king's chief architect, was governor of Harlech from 1290 to 1293.

Criterion III. The royal castles of the ancient principality of Gwynedd bear unique testimony to construction in the Middle Ages in so far as this royal commission is fully documented. The accounts published by Colvin (*The History of the King's Works*, London, 1963) specify the origin of the workmen, who were brought in from all regions of England, describe the use of quarried stone on the site. They outline financing of the construction works and provide an understanding of the daily life of the workmen and population and thus constitute one of the major references of medieval history.

Criterion IV. The Castles and fortified towns of Gwynedd are the finest examples of the late 13th-century and early 14th-century military architecture in Europe. Their construction, begun in 1283 and at times hindered by the Welsh uprisings of Madoc ap Llewelyn in 1294, continued until 1330 in Caernavon and 1331 in Beaumaris. They have only undergone minimal restoration and provide, in their pristine state, a veritable repertory of medieval architectural forms: barbicans, drawbridges, fortified gates, chicanes, redoubts, dungeons, towers and curtain walls.

Committee Decision

The Committee made no statement.

- Statement of Significance does not adequately define the outstanding universal value of the site
- The Statement of Significance is included in the Management Plan. The State Party will discuss and agree a revised Statement of outstanding universal value which will be submitted in due course for consideration by the World Heritage Committee
- No change required to UNESCO's official description of the site

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: adequate
- Buffer zone: adequate
- Four buffer zones around the component properties define their areas of essential setting and significant views into and out of the properties. They have been recently agreed by the steering group and are considered adequate. As these buffer zones were not defined in the nomination document, they will be submitted for the approval of the World Heritage Committee

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained

3. Protection

Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- By statute as scheduled ancient monuments; through town and country planning system; and through state care of the greater part of the monuments. These measures provide protection for the whole of the site
- The protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective

Actions taken/proposed:

- Proposals for improving the protection of the site as set out in Part 3 of the management plan.
- National and local levels of action. Timeframe: various

4. Management

Use of site/property

- Visitor attraction. Other: parts of town walls in state care are open to the public: others are closed. Also minor private uses

Management/Administrative Body

- Steering group formally set up on 01 / 01 / 2000 to approve the management plan and to set up a scheme of co-ordination between the interested parties
- Site manager on part-time basis
- Management under protective legislation
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: national (DCMS; Welsh Assembly Government exercised through CADW, the executive agency); local
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

Actions proposed:

- The management plan lists a number of projects and actions dealing with definition, conservation, protection and presentation of the 4 Castles
- Timeframe: various

5. Management Plan

- Management plan is being implemented
- Implementation commenced: September 2003 (revised: November 2004)
- Very effective
- Responsibility for over-seeing the implementation of the management plan and monitoring its effectiveness: Cadw on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government (Cadw appointed an external co-ordinator for the plan preparation but will co-ordinate implementation in-house); Conwy County Borough Council; Gwynedd Council; Isle of Anglesey County Council; Snowdonia National Park Authority (a joint scheme of co-ordination is being set up).

6. Financial Resources

Financial situation

- Welsh Assembly Government to Cadw; Welsh Assembly Government to local authorities and NPA; Welsh Assembly Government to Assembly Supported Public Bodies; Council tax
- Coordinator fees & expenses funded by Cadw for preparation of management plan
- The management plan has only been completed in 2004 and some of the needs identified in the plan have not yet been met or costs evaluated
- No funding drawn through World Heritage Fund
- Sufficient

7. Staffing Levels

- Number of staff: 16

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Very good: conservation, management, interpretation, visitor management
- Good: promotion
- Average: education
- Staff resources are inadequate
- No regular volunteers but other staff in Cadw and Cadwraeth Cymru also provide support

8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- Cadw archaeologists, architects and craftsmen and interpretation, publications and management staff. Cadw provides an annual seminar for site staff and a training scheme for all staff. Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales and National Museums and Galleries expertise is also available and specialist consultants are employed when necessary. The expertise of local authority staff is also available for the conservation and protection of the setting of the WHS
- Training needs: There is a general shortage of skilled masons and carpenters for conservation in Wales. This affects Cadwraeth Cymru, Cadw's own works organization, and contractors
- No training on site management for stakeholders

9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 533,390 visitors in 2004. Trend: 15% decline since inscription in 1986, in line with trend for historic sites in the holiday areas of Wales
- Visitor facilities: visitor centres, publications, interpretation panels, room labels, exhibitions and events
- Visitor facilities are inadequate
- Visitor needs: a visitor centre for Beaumaris Castle and improvements to facilities in the King's Gate at Caernarfon Castle
- There is a tourism/visitor management plan for the site: The plan is contained in Cadw's Presentation Branch Plan. This applies to the whole of Cadw's activities in relation to the estate in its care and extracts relevant to the WHS will be provided

10. Scientific Studies

- There is no agreed research framework/strategy for the site
- Condition surveys; visitor management. Other: Safety and access audits. Cadw undertook these studies for the whole of its properties in care
- Studies used for management of site: the quinquennial condition survey (*State of the Monuments 2002*) and safety audits are the basis for annual work programmes. Visitor records guide plans for managing the monuments

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- An adequate number of signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem used on some publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: visitors, local communities, businesses, local authorities
- There is no education strategy for the site: A programme is being considered. Cadw plans to discuss the relevance of World Heritage studies with local education authorities
- Need for awareness raising: the significance and extent of the site is often misunderstood. Locally there is a perception that each monument is a separate WHS and that the inscription extends to the whole town rather than being limited to the structures built by Edward I. As the significance of the

monuments lies in their value as a group, signing, publicity, education and information need to emphasise that it is an entity

- Cadw promotes the four castles within the World Heritage site with the World Heritage Logo on promotional leaflets, guidebooks and other information and publicity
- Website available
- No local participation but improved community links are proposed in the management plan

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- N/A

Conservation interventions

- The four castles, in a good state of repair and conservation at the time of inscription, have been maintained to the same standard through annual work programmes. The rock beneath Conwy Castle has been stabilised and is inspected regularly. The parts of Caernarfon Town Walls in state care have been maintained similarly but there are concerns about the condition of some parts that are in private care. The first-time conservation of Conwy Town Walls (in state care) has continued and completion of the whole circuit is in sight. Buried archaeology in adjacent areas has been investigated before redevelopment
- Present state of conservation: good

Threats and Risks to site

- Development pressure. Other: the economy of the region is one of the weakest in the UK and this is evident in the neglect of buildings in the proposed buffer zones – particularly at Caernarfon and Harlech
- Decay or loss of historic fabric; environmental damage from natural events; damage to setting from inappropriate development; possible detrimental effects of providing access for all; inability to provide adequate facilities for visitors.
- Emergency measures taken: Implementation of the management plan (management plan provides an assessment of the level of risk from threats to the site on a scale of 1 (least likely) to 10 (most likely)). Timeframe: various

13. Monitoring

- Formal monitoring programme
- Measures: occasional inspections by the Ancient Monuments Board (most recently in

2003); quinquennial review of the condition of the historic fabric with identification of priorities for actions required; Regular inspections by Cadw's conservation staff with programmes for priority actions; Regular monitoring of visitor management, presentation and security at the monuments by Cadw senior management with reference to Cadw's overall annual performance targets. This monitoring applies to the whole of Cadw's estate in care. There are no additional specific baseline indicators for the WHS

- Key indicators: Quinquennial review of the state of conservation of all monuments in state care in Wales (including those in the WHS) provides an indicator of their condition. Future reviews could include assessments against WHS criteria established at nomination and in WHC periodic reviews but these indicators have not yet been introduced

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation
- Strengths of management: development of the management plan and of the buffer zone are major achievements; interpretation and facilities for visitors have been improved; the continuing conservation of the most complete medieval town walls in Britain (Conwy); the diversion of traffic from the town into a new environmentally sensitive river crossing making possible the subsequent enhancement of the walled town (Conwy); and completion of the clearance of intrusive uses from the exterior of the town walls (Conwy). A visitor centre and car park have been provided off-site with a completely new access to the castle. There have also been significant improvements to the setting of Beaumaris Castle, in particular the restoration of the adjacent courthouse
- Weaknesses of management: the location of the six component monuments in four separate towns creates an awareness problem for the WHS. Formal partnership arrangements have been slow to develop. There has been a lack of involvement of the local community in the site

Future actions:

- Implementation of the management plan: promoting the site as an entity, proposing a scheme of Coordination, advocating more involvement
- No WH Funding is sought. Timeframe: various