

7. The Town Arch in the C20th and C21st – major traffic problem



The main road from England to Wales (pre M4), the A48, and the road from the Severn Ferry, both passed through the Tudor Arch! Telford in 1824 suggested a Severn Bridge but it was Chepstow Urban District Council in the 1920s that initiated the project to build the Severn Bridge to by-pass the 1524 Arch at Chepstow! The bridge project, taken over by GCC/MCC, then by the UK Government, was completed in 1966. In WWII there was talk of demolishing the Arch to help military convoys – but the Arch remained! Significant renovation in 1985/86. Chepstow Town Council (Mayor D. Dovey; Town Clerk Ms S. Bushell) bought the Arch and Gatehouse from MCC in 2008.

The Chepstow Society, and the first Chepstow Museum – in the Town Arch



In 1948 Ivor Waters (far right of picture) set up the Chepstow Society and Chepstow's first museum. It opened on 9 April 1949, 75 years ago, in the room above the Arch – the museum, now at Gwy House, and the Chepstow Society (www.chepstowsociety.co.uk) are still going strong.

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CHEPSTOW 500 1524 - 2024



Chepstow Castle, and St Mary's Priory, were founded in the C11th. The Norman town of *Striguil* (called '*Chepstow*' by C14th) grew up around them. A wall was built round the town and port in the C13th. **The only way in and out of the town by land for 700 years was the Town Gate.** The C13th wall remains but a 'new' Gate and Arch – the iconic image of Chepstow – was built and given to the town 500 years ago in 1524, with a Town Charter of 1524, by Charles Somerset, 1st Earl of Worcester, the last but one Marcher Lord.

This Leaflet has notes on: *the Town Gate/Arch; Charter; and Tudor Chepstow.*

1. The Town Gate and Arch

A Town Gate has existed for over 700 years. It was rebuilt in Tudor times and completed in 1524. **At the Town Gate tolls had to be paid to enter the town, and taxes on goods moving to and from the market and port.** Oliver Cromwell attacked, and marched through, the Arch - 11 May 1648.

Chepstow was a major port in South Wales C11th-C18th.



View of the port of Chepstow in 1705 by I. Kip

Outside the Gate was an Informal market in Moor Street by 'Robin Hood's Cross' to avoid the Town Gate taxes. The Cross was demolished in 1759. **150th anniversary of no taxes or tolls - 2024.** No taxes or tolls have been collected at the Town Gate since the death of Paddy Magill, the last collector of taxes, in 1874. See Ivor Waters (1984) booklet on the Town Arch.

2. The Town Wall or Port Wall – built 1272 to 1278



The Town Wall was built by **Roger Bigod, 5th Earl of Norfolk**, between 1272 and 1278). Roger Bigod was William Marshal's great grandson. The Wall was originally 1,123m long (700m remains but only 370m is visible); 5-7m high; 2m thick; 11 towers. R. Shoemith, pp 199-212 in Turner & Johnson 'Chepstow Castle' (2006)

3. The Town Charter of 1524 – presented 2nd December 1524

Begins - 'For the love and zeal which he has and bears to justice and the common weal of his town of Chepstow and for the relief, prosperity, and love which he has to the same town which is fallen to great injuries and decay for lack of reparation and good order, Charles, Earl of Worcester, Lord of Gower, Chepstow, and Tudenham, etc., grants that henceforth at Michaelmas the burgesses may have free election in choosing of their two bailiffs, that is to say, the burgesses may choose and appoint four sufficient burgesses which they shall present to the lord if within the realm of England or Wales, or if beyond the seas to the lord's steward.'

Source: National Library of Wales. Badminton Manuscripts (Deposited by the Beauforts). **The Charter had 29 clauses**, spelling out the rights and duties of the bailiffs including jurisdiction of the town. The bailiffs were also made **Clerks of the Market** inspecting bread and ale and other goods. Charter gave **safeguards** to the burgesses of Chepstow on **trade with foreigners at the port**; and finally, *'the said bailiffs to have their prison for the punishment of the said offences within the great gate which they have builded by the Earl's commandment'* (2nd Dec. 1524). Last town charter issued by a 'Marcher Lord' (most were issued by the Crown). From: W.R.B Robinson (1977) NLWJ XX pp. 85-94

4. The 'Marcher' (or 'Border-Land') Lords

The **'Marcher' Lords** were charged with protecting England from Wales, and they **ruled the border lands for nearly 500 years** as subjects of the King but with many powers of their own - some were to Chepstow's advantage as a port which avoided Royal taxes on imports – which were paid at Bristol.

5. The Somersets, Worcesters, Beauforts – all the same family

The Somersets (Earls of Worcester) were from the **Beaufort** family. From **1682** they became **'Dukes of Beaufort.'** Many titles: **'Henry Somerset; Duke of Beaufort; Marquis and Earl of Worcester; Earl of Glamorgan; Viscount Grosmont; Baron Herbert; Lord of Ragland, Chepstow, and Gower; Baron Beaufort.'**

Charles Somerset who gave the Charter and Town Arch to Chepstow also organised the famous **'Field of the Cloth of Gold'** in 1520 for King Henry VIII. **Chepstow Castle and the Somersets.** The Somersets owned Chepstow and Raglan Castles but lived at Raglan to 1660 then moved to Badminton, Glos. The Somersets, now the *Dukes of Beaufort*, sold Chepstow Castle to the Lysaghts in 1914 who put it into national care in 1953 - now CADW.

The Town Arch was given twice. The Arch came back to the Beauforts, probably at the Restoration of King Charles II, 1660, so on **7 October 1899, 125 years ago**, the Beauforts **'re-presented'** the Town Arch to Chepstow!

6. The Tudors (1485-1603) - and Tudor Chepstow

The Welsh Tudors - The most famous dynasty in British history – the Tudors (1485-1603): with **Henry VIII** and six wives; end of monasteries; break with Rome; **Elizabeth 1st**; Armada; Shakespeare; began with a **Welsh family from Anglesey**. Whilst the Town Gate of 1524 was there to keep the Welsh out of Chepstow, and in *Welsh Street*, **the Crown, ruling all of England and Wales**, had been **taken over by the Welsh!** **Henry VII**, born at Pembroke, with Anglesey roots through Owen Tudor, **made much of his Welsh heritage.**

The Tudors in Chepstow - **Town Gate** is Chepstow's **most prominent Tudor building.** Other signs of the Tudors are at: the Castle; some windows and doorways in town; and **historic Worcesters' tomb** in St. Mary's, Chepstow.



Henry Somerset, 2nd Earl of Worcester (d.1549); last Marcher Lord; and his wife, Elizabeth Browne Somerset 2nd Countess of Worcester (d.1565). Lady in Waiting to Queen Anne Boleyn and principal witness against Anne Boleyn at her trial in 1536.

The Dissolution of the Monasteries - Henry VIII's suppression of the monasteries 1536 – 1542 closed **Chepstow Priory, St Kingsmark Priory, and Tintern Abbey.** The superb **C11th Norman nave of Chepstow Priory remains** as the nave of St Mary's Parish Church. **Tintern** remains in ruins.