

SLEBECH PARK

Ref number PGW (Dy) 43 (PEM)

OS Map 158

Grid ref SN 025 145

Former county Dyfed

Unitary authority Pembrokeshire

Community council Slebech

Designations Listed buildings: Slebech Park (Grade II*); Old Church of St John the Baptist (Grade II); Stable Block (Grade II); Blackpool Bridge (Grade II*)
Scheduled Ancient Monuments: Remains of the church of St John the Baptist (PEM 275); Burial mounds on the island to the east of the church (PEM 276)

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park

Site evaluation **Grade II***

Primary reasons for grading This well preserved park and extensive garden is set within an outstandingly beautiful and picturesque location. The ancient site incorporates the romantic remains of the church of St. John the Baptist. Although now without the walled garden which was to the north of the stable block, the layout has changed little since the plan of *c.* 1790. The park and water features to the north and east of the house are recorded on this plan. The south-facing terraces, which overlook the Eastern Cleddau river, are of outstanding historical interest. They were probably constructed by Sir John Barlow or his successor during the reign of William and Mary, in the late seventeenth century. The range of plant material within the park and garden remains extensive and impressive.

Type of site Extensive park including water features, bridges and surrounding woodland areas. Informal garden and formal terraced garden.

Main phases of construction Late seventeenth century; eighteenth century onwards, some remodelling of the drives and other features from the early nineteenth century.

Site description

Slebech is situated in an outstandingly picturesque location on the western bank of the Eastern Cleddau river, in the upper reaches of its estuary. It is reached from one of two drives, both of which are over a mile long. The most convenient access is from the minor single-track road off the A40 to the east of Haverfordwest that leads to Picton Castle and Rhos. The other entrance is at the Mill at Blackpool, to the east. Here a fine bridge crosses the Cleddau river and the drive, referred to on the Ordnance Survey

map as Knight's Way, follows the course of the river to the house. Part of this drive, however, now belongs to the Mill and access can be interrupted.

The house is set at about 23 m AOD on the western side and at the southern end of a small valley. It is surrounded by the fields that formed the former parkland; to the west are the terrace gardens and to the south is the estuary. Between the house and the estuary are the picturesque remains of the church of St John the Baptist. A service is still held within the walls once a year but this church was replaced at the beginning of the nineteenth century by one (now empty) adjacent to the A40 road.

The present house, built c. 1776, was built 'castle wise' in that it once possessed castellated parapets and the rounded bays reflected the round towers of medieval keeps and gatehouses that occur throughout Pembrokeshire and beyond. The castellations were removed from the house some decades ago, but they remain on the outbuildings

The house is an imposing rendered block of three storeys, with sash windows of twelve lights on the two principal floors and of six on the upper floor. The flat roof, which is still surrounded by a reduced parapet is leaded and there are multiple chimney stacks to either end. The main entrance is to the west-north-west; the door, which is reached up a shallow flight of steps, being protected by a semi-circular canopy. The canopy, which forms an open porch, is supported by four columns, two adjacent to the house and two associated with the steps. This porch is topped with a small castellated design which, presumably, echoed the parapet of the house. To the north and south of the building are the semi-circular bays mentioned by Jones.

The site of Slebech is one of established settlement. In the twelfth century the site was occupied by the Commandery for the Knight's Hospitallers. No views or plans of this building appear in the National Library of Wales but an internal wall, in excess of 1 m wide, is believed by the present owner to have been one of the original walls. Following the Dissolution, Slebech became the home of the Barlow family and in 1773 Anne Barlow brought it to her husband, John Symmons of Llanstinan. By then the house was obviously in considerable need of attention and Jones (1951) refers to a letter from Anne Symmons to her mother Mrs Barlow, written in 1774, in which she complains that the house is cold and they are unable to shut the door because the smoke would not then go up the chimney. By 1776 another letter from Anne tells of building work which were being carried out under the direction of Mr Calvert. Plans, probably drawn up about 1760, are held in the National Library of Wales. These show the 'imitation castle' referred to by Sir Christopher Sykes in 1796 and also alternative designs for the principle entrance and other features. An estate plan of c. 1780 represents the landscape features reasonably accurately but on the house site, a massive 'castle' has been sketched in with a most impressive gateway to the west; this was never built.

In c. 1783 Slebech was sold to William Knox. Two years later a visitor wrote in his diary for 4 September 1787: 'In the way to H. West call at Slebech, a handsome house built Castle-wise, surrounded with fine Woods. The apartments are neat and pleasant. The estate is for sale, the purchase money £75,000. It appears to disadvantage from symptoms of neglect attending the family's leaving it'. In 1791 Mrs Morgan in her *Tour of Milford Haven* records: 'It is an exceedingly handsome house and has accommodations for a vast many people. I think they told us there were 25 bedrooms with each a dressing-room adjoining; and likewise two parlours, a study, a drawing room, a dining room and a billiard room, besides offices and accommodations of every other kind'. According to Jones (1996), the sale particulars of May 1792 of the 7,000 acre estate were very detailed, describing the interior of the house and the curtilage. He states that: 'The mansion had three regular fronts with flights of stone steps to the principle floor. The north and south fronts each extending to 88 feet with uniform semi-circular bows'.

Slebech was eventually sold to Nathaniel Phillips (*sic*) a wealthy Jamaica merchant. In 1796 Sir Christopher Sykes noted that : 'Slebech now Mr Phillip's but built by the Bowers (*sic*) now extinct. It is a beautiful Situation on the banks of the Clethy as is also Picton Castle between which places there is a fine Walk of 3 miles along the River side. It is a very good living house of 6 rooms, built in imitation tho a bad one of a Castle but altogether it is a very enviable Place, and capable of Improvement. It stands close to the inner angle of the River by which it commands two fine reaches, and when the tide is up it is very beautiful'. Estate maps from the Phillips occupation show the plan of the house very much as it is today, although some areas of the grounds were remodelled from *c.* 1815 onwards.

From 1822 to 1944, Slebech was the property of the de Rutzen family. John, Baron de Rutzen was killed in action in 1944. His widow, who inherited Slebech, later married Lord Dunsany . Slebech was then sold to the Hon. William Philipps, C.B.E., fourth son of the 1st Lord Milford and although he made some internal alterations, the house is essentially the structure erected by Symmons.

To the north and east of the house are the service buildings and stables. One building, which has been referred to as the kitchen or dairy abuts the house to the north. This is an extremely humble building when compared with the adjacent house to the south. Of one and two storeys with an extremely low parapet and single pitched roof, it is dominated by the massive chimney which is at the junction between the higher and lower sections of the building. The stack appears to have been recently rendered and it is thought that the parrel fluting is a representation of the original. Because of the size and complexity of the chimney, it has been suggested that this was part of the original structure of the Commandery.

To the north-east of the house and set nearly at a right-angle to it is the coach house and stable courtyard. This complex is thought to have been designed by Keck, who also worked at Penrice, Gower, in the late eighteenth century. The three-sided building stands mostly to two storeys with decorative recessed arches on the ground floor. Across these arches and below the castellated parapet run dressed stone string courses that would have originally stood proud of the rendering. At the two southern corners and over the principal grand entrance are elevated, castellated walls that give the effect of towers. Some of the rendering has now gone revealing that windows have been moved and blocked; although it is not clear when these alterations were made.

The history of this complex and other features immediately surrounding the house is shown by comparing an unattributed plan of *c.* 1815 held in the National Library of Wales with later surveys. The early plan shows how this complex was designed as part of the hard landscaping around the house, instead of being slightly set apart from it as is the case today. The plan shows that Slebech had a splayed forecourt to the front (north-west) of the house, as it does today, but that the drive continued around the house to the south to a 'D'-shaped forecourt and then to the east to the rear of the house, to a further splayed forecourt. The drive then continued to the grand entrance to the stable courtyard, beneath the diamond-shaped slate clock. Today the drive to the south and east is under lawns and ornamental plantings; the grand entrance is disused.

The *c.* 1815 plan also shows that the complex was more extensive than it appears today. The courtyard now consists of ranges approximately to the north, west and south with the yard being open to the east. The plan shows that there was once a substantial building across the yard and opposite the grand entrance. This building is referred to on an estate plan of 1819 as the coach house. The north range was also more extensive; the external wall to this range forming one of the walls to a walled garden.

The courtyard today is on two levels, the change in level being associated with the site of the former coach house. The upper part has a gravel surface and there are shrubs to mark the change of elevation. The walls, internally, are unrendered and the many wooden doors have six lights to their tops. All the windows appear to be casement. The surface of the lower level is not gravelled and some rendering remains on the walls here. The entrance to the courtyard is now from the north-west. Mapped evidence suggests that this entrance was inserted between *c.* 1815 and 1819 when Slebech was owned by Nathaniel Phillips. An arched entrance, which stands to some 4 m, has been inserted through the northern range of the complex and it has rounded stone quoins to *c.* 2 m; thereafter the arches are brick. To the north of this entrance is a further massive rubble stone wall that stands to some 6 m; within this wall is a flat topped arch, very different in character to the rounded arch of the stable complex. It is tempting to suggest, and mapped evidence reinforces this idea, that this wall was associated with the walled garden and was, therefore, built sometime before 1815; the arch, within this wall, being the earlier entrance.

Mapped and documentary evidence relating to Slebech suggests that the main area of gardens was always the extensive terraces to the west of the house. The early maps indicate that the water features included today within the informal gardens to the east and north of the house were extant within the parkland in or about 1780 and were, therefore, likely to have been utilitarian in origin, that is fish ponds and reservoirs. The water features will be included within the section on the park, even though some have, latterly, been incorporated into gardens.

Slebech park is situated with the gently rolling and fertile lands to the north of the Eastern Cleddau river some 8 km to the east of Haverfordwest. The land, which is essentially south-facing, is dissected by a small stream which has cut a wide, shallow valley which begins over a kilometre to the north of the house; the un-named stream enters the Eastern Cleddau just to the east of the house. Most of the park is under pasture, but the Brickfield, to the east, is used for potatoes and other fodder crops. Sources vary as to the extent of the park, the 1780 survey itemises three parcels of land namely:- 'The Front Meadow @ 73 acres, Levrittes(?) Division @ 78 acres and Kiln Park @ 67 acres'; giving a total of some 212 acres. The First Edition Ordnance Survey 25 inch map extends the area of park to the east giving some 222 acres but the western boundary has changed in the intervening years. The 1780, 1830 tithe survey and the 1887 survey also record the former field boundaries indicated by straight lines of parkland trees which cut across the latter land division. It is not known when these alterations were made. The Schedule of Apportionments drawn up to accompany the 1830 tithe map quite clearly defines the park as numbers 389 and 392 which are given as *c.* 84 acres and *c.* 76 acres respectively. These areas have remained under pasture and retain their 'parkish' feel although there have been more recent land divisions. The area defined by the Tithe Award Survey will therefore be regarded as the principle area of parkland, although reference will be made to features that either straddle the boundaries or that are just outside them.

Associated with the margins and shown on every survey are wooded areas containing both deciduous and coniferous trees. In 1830, the area of woodland within the 518 acre holding of Slebech is given as 234 acres; this does not include other sundry plantations but it does include Pickett wood. Woodland still surrounds the park although in some instances the native hardwoods have been replaced with fast-growing conifers; that notwithstanding, the areas occupied by wood appear to be much the same today as they were in 1780.

There have been many alterations to the drives, which can be associated with a change in ownership and were accompanied, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, with a rerouting

of parish roads. In 1780 four tracks are shown converging on the Lingham bridge to the north-west of the house, one from the west (which divides into two a little to the west of the bridge) and one track from each of the other compass points. The main drive at the time would appear to be the north-south links. By the time that the Tithe map was produced some sixty years later, the main drive seems to have been altered. From the house there is a straight track heading due north on the eastern side of the stream (this is also on the earlier survey). This drive then links with the track to the east Lingham Bridge, so that there is now a dog-leg heading east to join the (now) A 40 road at Pricketts Cross. Additional drives are also shown, one of which echoes the course of the present drive. A drive is also shown from the west of Slebech New Church to Rosehill. By 1860, this drive has been extended to meet the other tracks at Lingham Bridge.

The drive which is shown heading due west from the house is something of an enigma which may only be resolved by detailed archaeological survey. As mentioned above, this drive is shown as a faint line in 1780, fails to appear as an extant feature in 1815, is not shown on the Tithe map, but is shown on the 1860 survey. It fails to be recorded by the Ordnance Survey in 1887 and is not shown by them on any subsequent survey. No parkland trees are shown on the early surveys to suggest the course of a disused drive and none are extant today. The existence of this drive is, therefore, uncertain. Parkland trees are shown to indicate the course of the former main drive which ran due north from the east side of the house although most of these disappeared between 1887 and 1907. Although there have been several alterations, with the exception of the possible west drive, most of the former drives remain in some form the course either marked by hedges or they appear as earthworks, such as the former track to the east, which remains as a shallow, grass-covered, sunken way.

Today there are two possible approaches to the house, one from the west and one from the east and both are shown as tracks on the Tithe Survey. The entrance to the west drive from the minor road to Rhos is marked by a lodge immediately to the north. This two-storeyed small building, with two square bay windows, was built during the early Victorian period. Interrupting the slate covered roof at the south east side is a small, pitched gable with slates hung to either side. Surrounding the lodge is a low fence of wooden posts with two iron rails between. The drive, which is *c.* 2 km long, then heads almost due east until the Lingham Bridge is reached. The crossing acts as both bridge for the drive and dam, retaining the water in the pond above. Although somewhat overgrown at the time of visiting, it appears to have been constructed of an earthen bund within which are small stone-lined culverts that could be used to regulate the flow of water. As both the crossing and pond appear on the survey of 1780 it is presumed that this feature must have been constructed when Slebech was owned by the Barlows. From the Lingham Bridge, the drive follows the valley southwards on the east side to a second bridge. A crossing is shown here on the eighteenth-century survey and is shown in some detail on the 1815 plan. Comparison between the extant bridge and this plan suggest that it has been modified either by Phillips or de Rutzen. The bridge on the plan is shown as a graceful curve with parapets to either side. At its northern end two substantial square gate piers are shown, which reduce the width of the drive considerably. Pencil sketches on the plan indicate that changes post 1815 were intended, with both the drive and bridge being realigned. Although the course of the drive was not altered, the construction of the bridge was probably changed. Today, the bridge has a low stone parapet to either side. The construction of the bridge is curious in that ornate carved stones now form the parapet stops, but they clearly have been reused from elsewhere. Beneath the bridge is a small single-span stone arch. The drive then

heads south, passing through two wrought iron gate posts between which is a very fine, white-painted iron gate and sweeping into a forecourt to the west of the house.

Mapped evidence suggests that the east drive, *c.* 2 km in length, formerly led off the (now) A 4075 just to the south of Canaston Bridge. Immediately to the north of the turning is the Eagle Lodge, now in use as a private residence. Today, part of the length of the drive is the public road to Blackpool and Minwear. Just to the east of the Blackpool Mill is a fine bridge which was built to take the drive over the river to the north and link in the an east-west track. This single-span stone bridge was probably built about 1825 for the de Rutzens. Larger and far grander than any of the other bridges, it was obviously meant to impress. It is built mostly of coursed, undressed stone, but two external panels on either side, towards the abutments and which are proud of the surrounding masonry, are dressed. Also dressed are the two short external panels in the centre of the arch and the edge or rim of the arch itself. To the southern end of the bridge are stone piers which are topped by ball finials and there are similar decorations at the top of the central panels. At the top of the two outer, external, panels are plinths which were probably intended for ornamentation but these have since been removed. Also now associated with the Blackpool mill, although formerly part of the Slebech estate, are the gate piers that were once situated at the entrance to the drive. These two stone piers now stand to over 1 m and may have been rebuilt from some of the original stones. Both piers are topped with stone eagles.

Once over the bridge, the drive to the house runs west alongside the Cleddau river. The track is still usable, although gated. Immediately to the east of the house the drive forks, the lower route giving access to the stable complex and old church whilst the upper route joins with the western drive.

Within the park are a number of ponds, most of which are probably utilitarian in origin. Some, however, are adjacent to the west drive and would also have had an ornamental purpose. With the exception of a small pond in the north-east corner of Brickfield, all are associated with the valley and small stream that runs north-south to the east of the house. The pond within Brickfield is a curious feature that is only shown as a water feature on the Tithe Survey, although a small stream and scrub vegetation are shown on later surveys. Today this is unmistakably a pond, almost circular in shape, which has been created by damming the small hollow in this corner of the field. The retaining dam is an earthen bund but below this (to the south) is a rubble wall which may have been constructed as part of some earlier water management. The origins of this pond are obviously pre mid nineteenth century but it is not known when the stream was originally dammed.

On the 1780 survey only one pond is shown to the north of the Lingham Bridge; however, by the mid nineteenth century two are shown. The dam that created the upper pond has now been breached and as this feature is not recorded on the 1860 survey, it had presumably gone by this time. The lower pond north of Lingham Bridge appears intermittently on various surveys. It appears in 1780, and on the Tithe Survey, 1860. It is not recorded in 1887 but reappears by 1907. The pond is a crescent shape stretch of water, covering just over 1½ acres. To the south, adjacent to the drive, there appears to be the remains of a stone revetment and there is possibly a sluice which allows excess water to be drained into the culvert to the side of the drive and then into the pond immediately to the south of the drive. With the exception of the modern survey, all the earlier surveys consulted show one pond immediately to the south of the bridge, the modern survey records none. By 1887, the pond is shown as a rectangular feature

covering just over ½ an acre. However, on the same survey and immediately below (to the south of) the retaining bunding, is a larger rectangular area covering about 1½ acres. The western boundary is shown as a dotted line but the eastern boundary is shown as a straight, canal-like, stretch of water, which turns at the right angle at the southern end. Within this area, a small irregular stream is shown. It is tempting to suggest, therefore either the Tithe Survey was inaccurate in that only one pond was recorded or that between this survey and the First Edition 25 inch survey, a second water feature was created. Today some earthworks remain but the area has been invaded by scrub and marginal plants.

Immediately to the north of the bridge that carries the west drive through the gate to the forecourt of the house, is an area that is depicted on some maps and plans as being a more substantial pond than it appears today. This feature is clearly shown on the plan on 1780. On the 1815 plan it appears as a slightly curved stretch of water that may have been some 274 m long. Although the stream is clearly shown, the pond fails to appear on the tithe survey. It does, however, appear in a very reduced form as a small circular pond on both the First and Second Edition Ordnance Survey 25 inch maps. Today there is still some standing water, the small pond being the circular shape that is shown on the later surveys.

The stream emerges under the flattened arch of the bridge as a broader and more substantial stretch of water than the small stream above the bridge might suggest. This may be partly because the small pond to the north of the bridge acts as header tank, but the water is also partly withheld further down the stream by a retaining wall just over 1 m high, over which the water tumbles as a small waterfall. Between the waterfall and the bridge is a small, lozenge-shaped island. It is not known when these features were created. However the northern part of this feature is probably shown on the 1780 survey. It is depicted in delightful detail on the 1815 survey; the detail includes the supporting abutments to the dam as well as the dam itself. A path over the dam and waterfall is shown pencilled in as one of the proposed changes. It would seem that the path was never constructed as it does not appear on later surveys. To the south of the waterfall the pond (or small lake) broadens out considerably, although it is still a curving, irregular shape. The First Edition Ordnance Survey map refers to the ponds above and below the waterfall as 'fish ponds'. The 1815 survey shows that to the south of this larger pond a further arm extended westwards, immediately to the north of the (then) walled garden. Crossing this small sinuous canal a small bridge carrying a footpath is shown, clearly indicating an ornamental use. By 1887, the canal is shown detached from the main pond and today only part of it remains. The present owner suggests that the sluice /overflow is from this area, allowing excess water to be drained into the river. This must have been in addition to the sluice shown on the northern bank at the southern end of the pond on the 1815 and later surveys. At present, it is not possible to appreciate the extent of this feature as it has become extremely silted and overgrown. However, it is understood that the present owner intends to continue the clearing begun recently.

Just to the east of the park and set on top of the rising ground north of the estuary are the remains of a two-storeyed tower, known as the Temple of the Four Winds. Square in plan with the sides being some 5 m long, the four gable walls still rise to about 6 m. The original purpose of this small, cross-gabled, building is not known and from the architectural style it could have been constructed at any time between the mid seventeenth century and the mid nineteenth century, when it appears on maps as a simple square. It was probably a folly tower, acting both as an eye-catcher and gazebo. The tower was rendered internally and there was a fireplace on

the south wall. There were doors to the south and, possibly, the north, with windows on all sides on the first storey. Although now derelict, it remains an impressive feature in the landscape and has been included on the Register as an outlier to the park.

The garden lies mostly to the south-west and south-east of the house, although there was a walled garden to the north. Immediately around the house are informal lawns, specimen trees and shrubs. Below and to the south are terraces, are used for growing fruit trees, soft fruit and flowering herbaceous plants, which thrive in the southerly aspect. Early documentation of the garden is lacking, but the terraces are thought to date to the late seventeenth century. By 1815 they were very much an established feature. The impressive series of walled and grassed terraces is about 1,106 m long, reached either via a tunnel from the main garden area or from the walk that links through to the church. Between the walk and the 'house' garden is a retaining wall, in addition to the structural features associated with part of the terraces. The lowest terrace contains the remains of extensive glasshouses, parts of which survive. Although in many gardens glasshouses are purely utilitarian, nineteenth-century sources suggest that, whilst being productive, the glasshouses at Slebech were a considerable source of pride and something of an attraction as part of the ornamental garden.

There is a difference in level between the upper 'house' garden and the church of about 1.5 m. A stone wall, now somewhat overgrown, has been built to retain these levels. On the 1815 plan a wall is shown completely enclosing the church and separating it from the house and the rest of the garden. It has an entrance along the northern stretch and steps to the west. The wall is also shown separating the terraced areas to the west from the church and graveyard. Pencilled in are suggested alterations including the 'walk' that now links the church and terraces. The western section of the boundary/retaining wall is the best preserved and stands to 1.5 - 1.75 m. The adjacent flight of steps was clearly extant in 1815, as was the path from the steps to the house. Between the wall and the church some gravestones still remain amongst the yews, rhododendrons, camellias and other shrubs. Following the construction of the new church at Slebach (*sic*), to the north, in the late eighteenth century, the church now forms a most picturesque garden feature and a rose has been planted on the south wall.

To the east of the church and within the Slebech inlet is a low finger of land that, during some tides, becomes an island. This 'island' appears to have been deliberately planted with conifers and rhododendrons. Although scheduled as 'burial mounds' (PEM 275) it is probable that this island and its central mound are a deliberately constructed landscape feature and form an integral part of the garden. If this is the case, the landscaping was probably undertaken, again, in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. The rhododendrons and the pines which grow on the mound appear to be of no great age, but growth may be stunted because of environmental conditions.

Above the river is a terrace which is revetted above and below by stone rubble walls. This is a walk, constructed after 1815. It passes immediately to the north of an almost square building, which was extant in 1815. It has been suggested that this was the vicarage but this would appear to be unlikely as there was, at the time, no direct access from this building to the church. Two paths are shown on the 1815 plan leading directly to the building (and one to the north-west - now gone). It is very much more tempting to suggest, therefore, that this building was intended as the gardener's cottage and bothy for the garden staff. To the west of the 'cottage', the path kinks and heads almost due west. Planted on the south side, towards the estuary, is a row of evenly spaced and now seemingly ancient yew trees. However, these plants,

unlike other examples, are not shown on the early plan. Yew trees are extremely difficult to date but it is likely that these were planted post 1815 and, as they now obscure a fine view, probably originally as a hedge.

To the north of the path is a series of four terraces which do appear on the early plan and which utilise the natural slope of the land. The grass terraces are separated by sloping grass banks *c* 2 m high. They are now planted randomly with specimen trees and shrubs; the longest, lowest terrace is about 91 m long. The terraces decrease in length up-slope (north). No mapped evidence seen so far indicates formal paths on these terraces although paths are indicated on the upper and middle ones on the early plan. Restructuring of the gardens between 1815 and 1887 apparently did away with the middle path when the tunnel was constructed. However, Richard Fenton apparently knew the site well and had access to family papers and documents; indeed B.G.Barlow writing in the *National Library of Wales Journal* in 1947-48 suggests that Fenton may have 'acquired' some of the Slebech papers including, possibly, a late eighteenth-century map. That notwithstanding, Fenton does give some clues as to the origin of the terraces, stating that they were 'of Dutch origin, and much in vogue about a century ago'. This suggests the garden design influences introduced under the reign of William III and Mary II and would put the creation of the terraces to somewhere between 1689 and 1702, possibly during the occupation of Sir John Barlow or his successor.

To the north of the grassed terraces and the garden area and terraces to the west, is a massive stone rubble wall which stands for the most part to some 3 m; the stone appears to be red sandstone with lime mortar. In the uppermost, north-east corner is a tunnel which links this garden area with the lawned area that surrounds the house. The tunnel and approach passageway from the east are several metres long and about 2 m high, the shallow-arched roof being constructed of brick. Mapped evidence suggests that this was built between 1815 and 1887. Mr Phillips suggested that it had been constructed so that the local folk could visit the old church without walking through the main garden area.

Much of the grassed terraces, terraced garden area to the west of the yew walk and low-lying level ground below, which protruded into the estuary and was protected from the sea by a stone wall, was used as an orchard. This area covered just over 5 acres. Unfortunately, during the Second World War repair work to the wall, undertaken by prisoners of war, was inadequate and the low-lying area that once contained orchards and glasshouses is now a reed-bed.

To the north of the reed-bed and to the west of the grassed terraces are the three long terraces that make up the main garden area. As with their grassed counterparts these terraces have been constructed to make the most of the southerly aspect. They differ from them, however, in that the terraced levels are retained by rubble walls which have been built in the same style as the northern retaining wall mentioned above. Curiously, the two sets of terraces are not aligned and, as far as can be judged, were never so. It is not known whether the two sets are contemporary and, if not, which set Fenton may have been describing. Documentary evidence relating to the glasshouses indicates that these terraces were extant in 1799. Fenton may have been suggesting that these terraces had been remodelled when he states that the terraces had been 'happily made subservient to fashionable luxury, by presenting walls of the best exposure for out-door fruit, and a series of noble walks and parterres'. Whatever the date of construction the terraces, which are some 140 m long, they remain impressive landscape features.

The lowest, southern, terrace consists of a mown grass area sloping gently towards the estuary and, to the north of this slope, a linear range of small buildings, walls, footings and foundations that represent the remains of the once extensive glasshouses. The total length of this range would appear to have been a little under 91 m. To the front (south) of the range were the glazed areas, all brick-built, and behind, to the north of the brick dividing wall, were the more utilitarian areas of brick and stone, the rear wall to which is formed by the retaining wall to the next terrace. Here are the potting sheds, storage areas and boiler houses. Today the glazing has gone but the present owners use the remains of the glasshouse to grow a variety of plants. Some of the paths within that are used to separate the beds are, apparently, original and consist of two rows of square red tiles flanked by borders of spar or quartz stones. The western end is now used for soft fruits and here the 'vine arches' are most evident. The Slebech documents (numbers 10819 - 10823) kept in the National Library of Wales, indicate that William Hoare was the builder of the glasshouses. William Hoare was a tenant of 'Old' Lawrenny, where he is recorded as doing some work on the peach house; he also worked on the peach house at Cresselly. In 1799 an estimate for £948 was submitted for the glasshouses; however, this figure was reduced to £600 as the 'sheds' were repaired rather than rebuilt. The repairs and the construction of the houses was undertaken by c. 1800 but the unfortunate William Hoare had to wait for his fee until 1805, when Nathaniel Philipps finally paid his bill.

Set within the sloping grass at the eastern end of the southern terrace are several circular beds which contain herbaceous perennials. In the centre of the northernmost bed is a simple sundial, which is likely to be the one recorded on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map in 1887. It stands to about 1 m, with a simply faceted column of six faces topped by the dial, which still, apparently, has its original brass gnomon. To the western end of the glasshouses are more beds for soft fruits and at the extreme west end are the steps that give access to the terraces. A flight of twelve stone steps built into the retaining wall rises the 1.5 m to the next level. The steps have rubble risers and flag treads. To the west of the steps is the large stone rubble boundary/retaining wall (standing in places to 3 m) which separates the Slebech and Picton lands.

The second terrace, above the glasshouses, is only some 3 m wide and was much disturbed by consolidation and rebuilding work in the late 1990s. Rising above this terrace to just over 3 m is another massive retaining wall; again with steps at the west end. This flight of fourteen steps had been recently consolidated, as had the low parapet/retaining wall to the east.

The upper, northernmost, terrace is again quite narrow (2.75 m) and is kept as a mown grass walk which is planted with the occasional fruit tree, specimen trees, shrubs and several clipped yews at irregular intervals. At the eastern end of this terrace is the tunnel that links to the gardens surrounding the house. The upper retaining wall to this terrace, which also forms the boundary between the garden and the woodlands, is about 3 m high. One shallow buttress towards the western end was noted, which appears to be contemporary with the building of the wall.

A brief overview of the gardens is provided by 'Cambrensis' writing in the *Gardener's Chronicle* in November 1882 (p. 621). After outlining the venerable history of Slebech they continue: 'When the tide is in at Slebech there are few places that excel it in beautiful views of wood and water, the banks of the river being clothed with timber down to the water's edge. There are several miles of carriage drives through the forest and park, and in the woods some very fine old Silver Firs, many of them measuring from 10 to 12 feet in circumference and from

100 to 120 feet in height. The gardens, in which there is a good range of glass, are very ancient, and are laid out in walled terraces, the walls being covered in fruit trees. The upper terrace commands a fine view of the river on the one side, the other being planted with Coniferæ and Rhododendrons, and forms a splendid promenade. The present Baron has planted large numbers of ornamental trees and shrubs in the grounds, some of which are now fast growing into nice specimens, Cupressus Lawsoniana being the best. This is a tree which thrives well in this part of the country; as also do some of the Abies, the Silver Fir in particular. The south-westers from the Atlantic blow here in great severity, so that it is a matter of great difficulty to grow the choice varieties of Coniferæ'. Just over one hundred years after the article was written fine plants are still to be found at Slebech, including camellias, figs, fastigate and common yews, golden fastigate yews, Lawson's cypress, rhododendrons, beeches, purple prunus, copper beeches, redwoods, spruces and oaks.

Sources

Primary

Unattributed plan of Slebech Park (c. 1780): National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, ref 13958 No 42.

Coloured, (unattributed) plan of part of the park and the gardens of Slebech showing proposed alterations (c. 1815): National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, ref 13904 No 14.

Estate map (part), 1819: National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, ref 13903 No 13.

Tithe Award Survey and Schedule of Apportionments (c. 1830): National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

Plan of the estates of Baron and Baroness de Rutzen in the county of Pembroke (1860): National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, ref 13935 No 24.

Slebech papers, National Library of Wales, bundle numbers 10819 - 10823.

Secondary

'Cambrensis', *Gardener's Chronicle* (November 11, 1882), pp. 621-62, also fig. 109.

Charles, B.G., *Journal of the National Library of Wales*, vol. V (1947-48).

Jones, F., *Journal of the National Library of Wales*, vol VII (1951-52), pp. 203-04.

Jones, F., *Historic houses of Pembrokeshire and their families* (1996), pp. 195-96.

Whittle, E. *The historic gardens of Wales* (1992), pp. 33, 43.