

**CADW/ICOMOS REGISTER OF PARKS AND GARDENS
OF SPECIAL HISTORIC INTEREST IN WALES**

SITE DOSSIER

Coldbrook House

REF. NO. PGW (Gt) 30

OS MAP 161 GRID REF. SO 313126

FORMER COUNTY Gwent UNITARY AUTHORITY Monmouth B.C.
COMMUNITY COUNCIL Llanover

DESIGNATIONS

SITE EVALUATION Grade II

Primary reasons for grading

Multi-layered small park and gardens, dating from the medieval period to the early 20th century. Gardens partially preserved, park well preserved.

TYPE OF SITE

Landscape park of 18th and 19th centuries, with origins as medieval deer park; partial remains of 16th-17th-century terraced gardens, early 19th-century pleasure grounds and Edwardian terraced gardens; 18th-century walled kitchen garden

MAIN PHASES OF CONSTRUCTION

16th-17th centuries (terracing); 18th-century (park planting, kitchen garden); early 19th century (pleasure grounds); late 19th-early 20th century (terraced gardens)

VISITED BY/DATE Elisabeth Whittle/March 1991

HOUSE

Name Coldbrook House

Grid ref SO 314126 (site only)

Date/style Mainly c. 1750/Georgian

Brief description

Coldbrook House was demolished in 1954, and nothing of it remains. It stood in a small valley to the S of the Ysgyryd Fach hill, with a steep slope behind it (to the SE). The main front was to the NW, which looked out over the park. The approach was up a drive from the N front of the house to the Abergavenny-Raglan road to the W.

Coldbrook House had its origin in the medieval period, and was one of the most important houses in the county. Until 1720, when it was sold to Major Hanbury of Pontypool Park, it was owned by the Herbert family. It was remodelled for Sir Charles Hanbury Williams, son of Major Hanbury, in about 1750, with a Georgian front and Doric portico. The outside was little changed after this date, except for the addition of a wing to the SW in 1866-7. In 1889 it was sold to Lady Llanover, of Llanover House, thus bringing it back to the Herbert family. It was lived in until about 1930 by Lady Herbert.

OUTBUILDINGS

Name Stables

Grid ref SO 314126

Date/style, and brief description

To the W of the house site stands the late 17th-century stable block, which was not demolished with the house. It is in plain classical style, and was modernised as a private house in 1985. It is two-storey and rendered.

To its W are further ancillary utilitarian buildings, including a former coachman's cottage.

THE PARK

Central grid ref SO 314126

Date/style

Medieval-19th century/deer/landscape

GENERAL DESCRIPTION, HISTORY AND LAYOUT

There was a deer park at Coldbrook in the medieval period, and the stone boundary wall along the SW side of the park may well be medieval. This park lay to the S of the house, and possibly also to the N. It was disparked sometime after 1749, when it still had a 'very good stock of old bucks'.

It is probable that Sir Charles Hanbury Williams planted trees in the park in the middle of the 18th century (in 1754 he talked of 'new plantations', and late 18th-early 19th century visitors talk of the well wooded park, and 'grounds beautifully diversified, and richly clothed with oak, beech, and elm' (Coxe). The house itself was described as being 'embosomed in the wood' (Coxe). Older features in the park, such as avenues, were allowed to remain (a 1753 drawing by Meredith Jones at Llanover shows avenues leading off all four fronts of the house), and survived in part until the early 20th century. Planting also took place in the 1820s and 1880s. By 1849 (survey map) the main clumps to the S of the house were in existence, and by 1888 (sale particulars) the park to the N was shown dotted with trees, with part of an avenue, and with the main drive lined with trees. Apart from the avenue these features remain today. The Abergavenny-Raglan road originally ran along the S boundary of the deer park, nearer to the house. Its course is now field boundaries (public footpath) running NW from the present entrance to the park, the old secondary drive. The road was moved to its present position in the early 19th century, and the drive extended (the last part has now been cut off by the 20th-century moving of the road slightly northeastwards at this point).

The park is now rolling pasture, dotted with mature clumps and individual trees (mainly deciduous). The original main drive is flanked by limes, probably planted in the 1880s, but the early 19th century lodge at the entrance, on the line of the old road, (Gothic, octagonal, single-storey) has been demolished.

STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

Drives

There are two drives, one, the principal one, to the NW of the house, and one, the secondary one, to the SW. The principal one is at present disused, and the secondary one is used to reach the buildings. Both drives were in existence by 1849 (survey map).

The principal drive runs NE from the Abergavenny to Raglan road (A 40) to the NW side of the house site. It runs straight for most of its length, and then curves round southeastwards, skirting the E side of the kitchen garden. It is gravelled, and is lined with limes.

The secondary drive is tarmacked, and runs straight from the Pen-y-parc lane northeastwards to the house site. It is lined with limes and newly planted Norway maples.

WATER FEATURES

The slope above the house site, to its S and E, abounds in springs. Some of the water is piped underground and some joins the stream running through the grounds. Ornamental use has been made of this abundance in the grounds rather than in the park.

BUILT FEATURES

Walling

A stretch of stone walling running along the SW boundary of the park, from the entrance to the secondary drive SW for c. 300m. along the N side of the lane. This is part of the old deer park boundary, and is probably medieval. It is up to c. 2 m. high, crumbling in places, in others standing to its full height.

PLANTED COMPONENTS

The park contains some fine mature deciduous trees, some possibly mid-18th century in date (Sir Charles Hanbury-Williams), some probably dating from the 1820s, when there was a renewed burst of planting. Most are scattered individual trees, but there are also a few clumps, all of which were in existence by 1849 (survey map).

To the N of the house site the park has a number of individual mature deciduous trees, mainly oaks, and a clump of deciduous trees (mainly limes). To its NE is an isolated cedar.

To the S of the house site the ground rises steeply, and on the slope are a two isolated mature sycamores and a large oak in the SW corner of the field. Above the gardens are two clumps of oaks. At the top of the hill is a large clump of mixed deciduous and coniferous trees, including Scots pines (with a small pond in the middle), and to its N is a smaller clump of beeches.

The main drive is flanked by limes (it is shown tree-lined on the 1888 sale particulars), possibly dating to the early 1880s. The secondary drive is flanked by limes and Norway maples of mixed age (some recently planted). (This drive was not tree-lined in 1888.)

BOUNDARIES

Field boundaries (hedge, fence), except for stretch of walling along the SW side.

ESSENTIAL SETTING, VIEWPOINTS AND CONTINUATIONS OF FEATURES BEYOND THE PARK, EYECATCHERS ETC.

Essential setting: farmland (pasture) to N and S of the park, and woodland to the E

LAND-USE

Agricultural - pasture

ELEMENTS OF BOTANICAL OR OTHER NATURE CONSERVATION INTEREST

None known

SURVIVAL OF INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS

Structural components: nearly complete/good

Water features: (none)

Built components: little/fair

Planted components: some/good

THE PLEASURE GARDEN AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

Grid ref SO 314126

Date/style 16th-17th century; early 19th century; late 19th-early 20th century/terracing; informal pleasure grounds; terraced formal gardens

GENERAL DESCRIPTION, HISTORY AND LAYOUT

The gardens and pleasure grounds lie mainly to the E and W of the house site, in the small valley in which the house stood. A stream runs through this valley, augmented by springs on either side, and to the W of the house it is dammed to form a small elongated lake.

The gardens and pleasure grounds were developed in three distinct phases. First, probably in the 16th or 17th century, the steep slope behind (to the SE of) the house was terraced into several shallow narrow terraces with stone revetment walls. These terraces survive, as does a small rectangular cold bath next to them, fed by a spring on the hill above.

The second phase was the development of the pleasure grounds to the E and W of the house, in the valley bottom on either side of the stream. This may have been begun in the mid 18th century by Sir Charles Hanbury-Williams, who was talking of 'new plantations' in 1754, or it may date from the early 19th century. Certainly by 1849 (survey map) the pleasure grounds (called shrubberies and plantations), lake, and kitchen garden were in existence, while to the NW of the house was an open area called 'The Lawn', with the stream running along the boundary between lawn and park. (The area of the 'Lawn' is at present being dug up to form a lake, with a new dam next to the drive.) The pleasure grounds were planted up with mixed deciduous and coniferous trees and shrubs, and their overall character was maintained until the recent gales, when most of the trees were blown down. They are now largely open, particularly the area to the W of the house, with a few mature trees remaining in the area to the E. The lake is thought to have been formed in the early 19th century. Below its substantial earthen dam is a very ruined stone feature which is thought to be an artificial waterfall (previously interpreted as the ruins of a mill, but there is no sign of any mill building). South-west of the lake are two small artificial ponds, which were probably utilitarian in purpose.

After the purchase of Coldbrook in 1889 by Lady Llanover the area to the E of the house, N of the stream, was formalised into terraced gardens with formal paved walks and steps. At some stage, possibly at the same time, the stream was canalised, with revetment walls and a mini waterfall. The structure of this area remains, although neglected, and some of the paths and steps can be traced. Along the N boundary an overgrown yew tunnel walk remains. A chapel was later built on the slope to the S of the stream, and this survives in a semi-derelict condition. It is thought to be on the site of an earlier, medieval chapel, which was turned into a grotto/bath-house. Bradney reported this ruined (1906), and turned into a bathing place.

STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

Terraces SE of house site

The slope behind the house site is terraced into two terraces. The top one is long and narrow, with a stone revetment wall c. 1 m. high along its back (broken down in the

middle) and sides. The terrace is narrower towards its W end, where there is a drain under it leading to the cold bath. The wider part of the terrace has a scarp below it c. 1.5 m. high (maximum), the narrower part a stone revetment wall c. 1.2 m. high. The lower terrace is bounded by a low scarp c. 0.8 m. high, and is narrower in front of the revetment wall. Below this part is the site of a building, now gone.

Above the terraces, on the boundary of the garden, is a ha-ha. This runs the length of the S boundary of the gardens, and is composed of a ruinous stone wall c. 0.7 m. high, leaning inwards and broken down in several places, with an external ditch part of which has water running in it (from drains from the springs above).

Near the terraces are two sunken features: a square sunken area near the garden boundary to the E of the terraces, with a stony bank along its N side (? site of grotto); and a cold bath just to the W of the lower terrace. This is a stone-lined rectangular pit, c. 2.5 m. deep, with water entering through a drain at the E end and leaving through a drain at the W end.

Terraces NE of house site

In the angle formed by the stream and the NW boundary of the pleasure grounds the ground has been levelled into three terraces bounded by scarps c. 1.2 m. high. Along the NW side is a slightly raised path edged with dry-stone walling, with a yew walk along it above the middle terrace. The revetment wall below it becomes higher towards the E end, and below it, around the NW and NE sides of the top terrace is a raised walk with a dry-stone wall below it. Most of these walls are ruinous.

There are traces of paths running along the edges of the terraces, and dividing them into quarters. The path near the lower edge of the upper terrace leads to steps down to the stream.

The stream is revetted with dry-stone walling along the SE boundary of the terracing (broken down in places), and near the steps down from the upper terrace is a small artificial cascade.

The stream continues around the edge of what was called 'The Lawn', and is culverted under the drive, where it is canalised, with a waterfall below the drive.

The lake

The lake lies to the W of the house site, to the W of the main drive. It is artificial, formed by damming the stream with a massive dam at the lake's W end. It is roughly rectangular, informal in outline. In the dam, near the S end, are two sluices, one disused, and one with a channel leading to the artificial waterfall.

There are two further small ponds to the SW of the lake, both of which probably had a utilitarian function. The upper one is roughly circular, with water in it, a sluice in the NW corner, and a winding channel below it leading to the lower pond to the W. This is a silted up rectangular pond which was a watercress bed. It has a stone dam at its W end and an artificial bank along its N side.

BUILT COMPONENTS

To the SE of the Stable House is a cobbled court surrounded by a low revetment wall (rebuilt 1985). In the centre is a circular brick-edged pool with a single jet fountain in the middle (uncertain age, but not modern).

Terraces SE of house site

At the SW end of the terraces, between the upper and middle terrace, is a flight of stone steps (in the process of being uncovered when site was visited).

On the garden boundary, to the SW of the terraces, is a small iron gate leading into the field.

Terraces NE of the house site

At the W end of the terraced garden to the NE of the house site are the remains of a small stone bridge over the stream. Only its sides, topped by rounded stones, survive. The W side of the bridge has iron railings on top, which continue along the boundary of the garden to the NE. The stream here is stone revetted.

At the SE end of the path along the lower edge of the upper terrace is a flight of stone steps leading down to the stream.

The chapel

Near the E boundary of the gardens, above the stream, stands a small modern (post 1888) rectangular chapel. It is gabled, single-storey, built of stone, with a slate roof, has four mullioned and transomed windows on each long side and a round-arched entrance with a circular window over it on the NW side. It is in reasonable condition, although some slates are missing, the window glass has gone, and a tree is growing in the gable end. It stands on the site of a medieval chapel which was converted into a grotto/bath-house, probably in the 19th century. (It is shown as such on the plan in the 1888 Sale Particulars.) Below it a stream runs down to the main stream, and half-way down it is a mass of stones, possibly from the original building.

Artificial waterfall

To the W of the dam of the lake, near its S end, is a very ruined stone structure which was probably for a waterfall. Built up on an artificial mound c. 4 m. high is a stone-lined channel leading to a stone-lined 'ravine' with sloping splayed sides. Water was diverted to it from the sluice in the SW corner of the lake. The lip of the waterfall is formed by stone slabs cut with a curved edge (still precariously in place). The whole is very ruinous.

ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENTS

Terraces NE of house site

In the middle of the central terrace is a square stone plinth, possibly a sundial base.

The outer edge of the upper terrace path is edged with bricks on edge.

PLANTED COMPONENTS

The gardens/grounds to the E and S of the house were until recently heavily wooded (except on the terraces). Recent gales have brought most of the trees down, and the area has been largely cleared prior to landscaping. Scattered over the area are a number of mature deciduous trees, such as a horse chestnut to the E of the terraces SE of the house site, and a copper beech to the W. The area also contains some Scots pines, three wellingtonias (on the S side of the stream), yews, and rhododendrons. There are grown-out remains of yew hedging along the S boundary of the terraces to the NE of the house site, and a tunnel of yew c. 3 m. wide (inside) on the N side of the middle terrace, continued as a yew hedge along the same side of the upper terrace.

In front of the house site, on its NW side, is a rectangular level lawn.

The area of grounds to the W of the house was likewise until recently well wooded, with a good understorey of shrubs. Almost all the trees have been blown down, and the area has been cleared, leaving much laurel.

Reconstructions of original planted features

None

Special collections of garden plants

None

Documented living plants

None

Other (including elements of nature conservation interest)

None known

ESSENTIAL SETTING AND VIEWS BEYOND THE SITE

Essential setting: park to N and S of gardens and grounds

Views beyond site: from house site (NW front) NW over park (A on map) and E over park (B on map)

ANY SPECIAL FEATURES

None

SURVIVAL OF INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS

Structural components: Most/fair

Built components: Some/fair

Architectural ornaments: Very little/fair

Planted components: Very little/poor

UTILITARIAN GARDENS

NAME Kitchen garden

Grid ref SO 313126

Date/style late 18th century/walled kitchen garden

DESCRIPTION

The walled kitchen garden is situated N of the lake, between the lake and the stream. It is now largely derelict and disused, but with some traces of its original layout and planting.

The garden was made by Sir Charles Hanbury-Williams in the second half of the 18th century. In 1755 he asked a man called Birt to select a site for a kitchen garden.

The garden is four-sided, with stone walls faced with brick on the inside on all but the S side, which is open to the lake. The W wall stands mostly to its full height of c. 2.2 m. It is broken down at its S end, where there is an old door. The N wall is c. 3.5 m. high, with a two-storey brick and stone house set against it, near the W end (now a private house). There are signs that the garden front once had 6 arches, which are now blocked. To the E of it is a ruined glasshouse, with a doorway to its W. Outside the N wall are some lean-to sheds. The E wall is well preserved, and stands to its full height of c. 3.5 m. In the middle is a round-arched opening with a simple ironwork gate in it.

The interior is rough grass. Across the middle, running E-W, is a wide grassed-over central path lined with ancient espalier apples. There are traces of a perimeter path along the inside of the E and N wall (E end), with further espalier apples on its inner side. Inside this are some brick cold frames.

SOURCES

Primary

'Book of Maps of the Coldbrook Estate' (1849): Gwent Record Office (D591.6.1167)
Coldbrook House, Sale Particulars 1888: Newport Reference Library (px M410 (910))

Secondary

D. Williams, *A History of Monmouthshire*, (1796).
W. Coxe, *An Historical Tour in Monmouthshire*, (1801)
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South Wales Daily News, Aug 10th and 13th 1910
P. Smith, 'Coldbrook House', *Arch. Camb.* CVI (1957), pp. 64-71.