

LAUGHARNE CASTLE AND CASTLE HOUSE

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| Ref number | PGW (Dy) 2 (CAM) |
| OS Map | 159 |
| Grid ref | SN 3020 1075 |
| Former county | Dyfed |
| Local authority | Carmarthenshire |
| Community council | Laugharne |
| Designations | Castle: Guardianship Ancient Monument; Scheduled Ancient Monument; Listed buildings: Castle (Grade I), Walls (Grade II), Gazebo (Grade II) Castle House: Listed Building (Grade II*) |
| Site evaluation | Grade II |
| Primary reasons for grading | The larger part of the garden of Laugharne Castle is an unusual example of a picturesque garden laid out within a medieval castle. Its earliest remains date to the Tudor period but are limited to cobbling in the inner ward. The main garden, in the outer ward, has been restored and replanted by Cadw within its early nineteenth-century layout. It contains an early nineteenth-century gazebo with fine views out over the Taf estuary. |
| Type of site | Reinstated early nineteenth-century garden, with earlier features within the castle wards and defensive walls. |
| Main phases of construction | 1580s – 90s; early nineteenth century; early 1990s |

Site description

Laugharne is a historic seaside town some 12.5 km (8 miles) to the south-west of Carmarthen. At the southern end of Market Street, which still retains much of the Georgian character, is the imposing Outer Gatehouse of Laugharne Castle; immediately to the north-east of the Gatehouse is Castle House.

Laugharne Castle, in common with many other Anglo-Norman fortifications in this area, was built as a coastal stronghold, being on a promontory adjacent to the Taf Estuary on its eastern and southern sides and with the Coran River to the west. It was founded in the early twelfth century. The present remains consist of a mid to late thirteenth-century castle converted to a Tudor mansion in the late sixteenth century. The remains, which have been extensively rebuilt and consolidated over the centuries, consist of an outer gatehouse and medieval and later curtain walls enclosing the Outer Ward and an Inner Ward enclosed by thirteenth - century fortifications and a sixteenth - century Tudor range. The present garden area of the castle is within the Outer Ward and includes a gazebo built on medieval foundations.

The garden that occupied the grounds of Castle House and the castle was for many years a private garden, in common ownership. In 1787, Elizabeth Ravenscroft inherited the castle and its grounds under the terms of the will of Pennoyre Watkins, her grandfather. In 1798, Elizabeth married Colonel Richard Isaac Starke and it was the Starke family who had the old Castle House, which was probably built in about 1730, modified and altered in about 1810. As the Starke family owned Castle House and the adjacent castle, the garden extended to both properties. This remained the case until 1973, when Miss Anne Starke placed the castle in the guardianship of the Secretary of State for Wales. For much of the time from the end of the eighteenth century onwards the house was occupied by the family, but between 1934 and 1947 it was rented to the author, Richard Hughes, who was a friend of Dylan Thomas and Sir Clough Williams-Ellis. A small exhibition about Richard Hughes is situated in the gazebo.

The garden of Castle House remains private but the garden within the castle is open to the public. The present layout is based on that of the early nineteenth century and the garden was restored and replanted by Cadw in the early 1990s.

The Outer Ward is five-sided, with the castle ruins in the centre of the south side and the outergatehouse at the apex of the north side. It is enclosed by rubble stone curtain walls on all but the north side to the east of the outer gatehouse, where the curtain wall was rebuilt as a high brick garden wall. A Victorian glasshouse stood against the east end of this wall but it has been completely removed. The garden in the Outer Ward retains its early nineteenth-century layout of lawns, shrubbery, formal rose beds and borders. The lawn occupying the west end of the ward was once a croquet lawn. Paths surfaced in crushed cockle shells, as were the originals, bound the lawns, beds and borders and wind through the shrubbery. A raised path runs along the inside of the south-east curtain wall and originally extended to the first-floor oriel window at the east end of the hall against the south curtain wall of the inner ward. From it there are fine views out over the parapet to the estuary, sea and, in the distance, the Gower. The restored circular gazebo is situated half way along this walk, built on the foundations of a medieval tower. It is built of rubble stone, with a pyramidal slate roof. There is a door on the inner side and windows facing out over the estuary. The door has been reinstated in its original position on the north side, having previously been on the south-west facing side. The shrubbery lies at the east end of the garden, on ground sloping up towards the walk along the curtain wall. It is informally laid out, divided into four sections by paths. The formal rose beds lie in a rectangular area close to the north wall, along which is a border. The 18 beds are small and of irregular sizes. They are bounded by dwarf box edging and have narrow paths between them. To their west is a circular feature that is part of the original design, although it is not known what was at the centre. As part of the recreation of the garden a tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) was planted in the middle.

By 1990, when the restoration scheme for the garden was begun, there was little left of it except the basic layout and a few mature and over-mature trees. Almost all the planting, therefore, was new. Great care was taken to select plants known to have been used in shrubberies and rose gardens in the early nineteenth century. Photographs from the 1920s also provided useful information on the appearance of parts of the garden at that time. The rose arches across the path linking the glasshouse on the castle side to the shrubbery, which appear in the photographs, have not been restored. A narrow border, which ran southwards along the inner side of the curtain wall from the gazebo, has also been omitted from the restoration scheme. A few of the mature trees have been retained, in particular a cedar of Lebanon (to be replaced eventually by a *Pinus radiata*) and an evergreen oak (*Quercus ilex*), which stand at either end of the shrubbery.

The first known garden was created in the late sixteenth century when the castle was in the ownership of Sir John Perrot. Sir John had been granted the castle in 1575, when it is probable that he began the first phase of the alterations to convert it into a mansion. The second

phase may date from 1584, when his tenancy of the castle was confirmed. These alterations included turning the Outer Ward into a garden and creating a courtyard garden with decorative cobbling and a fountain in the Inner Ward. Traces of this cobbling still survive.

When Elizabeth Ravenscroft inherited the castle it was in a ruinous condition and work was undertaken to consolidate and rebuild some of the structure and to establish the gardens. This probably took place after her marriage to Colonel Richard Isaac Starke in 1798. During this time the curtain wall appears to have been rebuilt on the north and west sides, complete with mock battlements and a raised walk created along the south-eastern walls towards the great oriel window that would have lit the upper end of the Tudor Hall. The gardens that were created within the picturesque ruins were not to every traveller's taste. J.T. Barber, who published an account of his tour of South Wales and Monmouthshire in 1803, was a great lover of the picturesque. He commented only that the ruins are 'ivy-mantled'. However B.H. Malkin, in an account of his excursions, was moved to ascerbic comments. He found that the castle itself was a 'picturesque subject ... but the proprietor has laid out the inner court as a modern garden, and in every respect done his utmost to destroy the character of the ruin towards the water. Not only the area, but even one of the towers, is converted to the purposes of horticulture, and filled with incongruous ornaments of evergreens and flowering shrubs'. It is not clear whether Malkin is also referring to the gazebo. It is, however, shown in the *View of Laugharne Castle*, which was painted by J.M. Ince in 1830.

There are two connecting doors in the north-eastern wall of the outer ward, between the castle grounds and the garden to the rear of Castle House. Within this part of the garden are the remains of a small orchard, surrounded by a low dry-stone wall, a glasshouse, that was back-to-back with that within the outer ward and next to it a substantial potting shed.

Sources

Primary

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Secondary

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