

OLD BEAUPRE

Ref number	PGW (Gm) 38 (GLA)
OS Map	170
Grid ref	ST 009 720
Former county	South Glamorgan
Unitary authority	The Vale of Glamorgan
Community council	Llanfair
Designations	Listed buildings: Old Beaupre Castle Grade I; Old Beaupre farmhouse Grade II*; Former hall range to south of Old Beaupre Castle Grade II; Old Beaupre barn Grade II. Guardianship Ancient Monument (Gm 1)
Site evaluation	Grade II
Primary reasons for grading	The remains, now largely earthworks, of extensive formal gardens belonging to one of the more important sixteenth-century houses in Glamorgan. These include terracing, walks and ponds and the whole complex has a delightful setting in the peaceful Thaw valley.
Type of site	Walled and earthwork remains of formal sixteenth-century gardens; terracing; ponds.
Main phases of construction	<i>c.</i> 1550-1600

Site description

Old Beaupre is a substantial, largely sixteenth-century ruined manor house situated on level ground on the eastern edge of the Thaw valley in the Vale of Glamorgan. The setting is very rural and peaceful, with the small river quietly flowing through the gentle valley of pasture fields. The ground drops quite steeply to the west of the buildings down to the river.

The manor consists of a number of ranges, built in local lias limestone, around two courtyards, the Middle Court to the north of the Inner Court. The walls mostly stand to roof height but only the farmhouse, a block on the south side of the Inner Court and part of the central range are roofed. To the north of the Middle Court is a rectangular Outer Court surrounded by a roughly coursed rubble wall with a narrow gate in the north side. A join in the stonework indicates that this was once wider. A doorway and steps at the south end of the west wall lead through to a pasture field which is the site of the former gardens.

The Middle Court consists of the main entrance, the outer gatehouse, on the north side, a three-storey west wing, curtain walls along the east side and north end of the west side and the central range on the south side. This contains the mediaeval gatehouse and hall. In the centre of this side is a fine storeyed porch giving access to

the hall. It is dated to 1600 by an inscription and contrasts with the rest of the manor both in style, which is partly classical, and stonework, which is of Bath and Sutton stone. The Tudor arched entrance is flanked by pairs of attached Doric columns, with Ionic and Corinthian ones in two stages above. The porch is decorated with strapwork and has a large heraldic panel over the entrance.

The Inner Court is bounded by a two-storey farmhouse, occupied as a separate dwelling, on the east side and on the south by two blocks at right-angles to each other and a length of high walling to their east. The west side is occupied by the garden terrace.

Old Beaupre was largely built in the sixteenth century, although it has mediaeval origins. Its chief occupants were the Bassett family, who are first recorded here in 1262. The Bassetts were an important family in the county and the rebuilding of the manor in the sixteenth century demonstrated their wealth and status. The earliest buildings on the site are those around the Inner Court, dating to *c.* 1300. In 1511 the Bassett heiress, Eleanor, married Rice Mansel of Oxwich Castle, Gower. It was Rice Mansel (died 1559), knighted in 1527, who began the enlargement of the manor house with the alteration of the hall block and the building of the west wing of the Middle Court. Sir Rice's daughter Catherine married the heir to Old Beaupre, William Bassett, and it was William (died 1586) and his son Richard who continued the rebuilding. The remainder of the Middle Court was completed, probably by William, in 1586 and the porch in 1600. The heraldic panel over the gatehouse entrance bears the initials R B (Richard Bassett) and C B (Catherine Bassett, his first wife) and the date 1586. On the porch is an inscription stating that Richard Bassett built the porch in 1600 at the age of 65.

After the Civil War the family declined in importance and the manor was finally sold in 1709. It was subsequently allowed to fall into ruin except for one wing which became a farmhouse.

To the south-east of the manor house is a substantial stone barn of coursed rubble, aligned north-east/south-west. Now roofless, it dates to the early sixteenth century.

The Tudor gardens of Old Beaupre lie in two main areas. First, there are garden remains within the complex of the manor's buildings and secondly a more extensive area of garden earthworks survives on the sloping valley side to the north-east of the manor.

Within the manor itself are two garden features. First, along the east side of the Middle Court is a raised grass terrace *c.* 1.2 m high with a low stone revetment wall at its foot and a step up to it at the south end. This is very probably a garden feature. It is backed by the curtain wall, which originally had a wall walk along the top. This, too, probably served a pleasurable purpose in providing a view out over the deer park and countryside.

From the sixteenth century, and possibly earlier, the Inner Court's function was probably partly or wholly that of a garden. A rubble wall, low on the east side and higher on the south, makes a rectangular enclosure between the central range and the mediaeval block to the south. This is used at present as the garden of the farmhouse. It is enclosed on the west side by a similar wall with gaps at the north and south ends and a fallen section in the middle where there was originally a small building projecting over the slope to the west. The garden enclosure ends on the west side, beyond the wall, with a lower small rectangular terrace. It is built out over the slope, bounded by dry-stone coursed rubble stone walls *c.* 2-2.5 m high on the outside, with

parapets projecting *c.* 0.7 - 1 m on the west and south sides and up to 1.5 m on the north side. On this side the wall curves outwards to give a 'look-out' in the corner of the terrace, below which it continues down to the river. The foot of the slope bounding the terrace on the east side is held by a low revetment wall of uncertain but possibly modern date. The grass slope below the gap at the south end of the wall at the top of the slope may be masking a flight of steps. Outside the terrace, on the west side is a further narrow turf terrace, perhaps formerly a walk, before a steep drop below.

The second area of gardens occupies a five-sided area to the north-east of the manor, on ground sloping south-west and westwards down to the river Thaw. The area is enclosed by field boundaries and walls and by the river on the south-west side. At the north end the river makes a sharp bend to the east on the line of the boundary suggesting either that this was an obvious place to start the gardens or that the river was diverted eastwards here so that it would flow more or less in a straight line at the foot of the gardens. The lower half of the area is divided into rectangular compartments by low turf-covered banks and scarps, with a series of ponds, some with water, some dry, at the foot of the slope next to the river. At the south end the door in the west side of the Outer Court leads to uneven ground with stonework showing on its north-west side and with a slight drop on its north and west sides. Below is further uneven ground and an east-west bank leading down to a curving bank and ditch around the east and north sides of a roughly circular pool at the foot of the slope. This is overgrown but holds some water. To the north a prominent bank runs east-west down the slope, with a gap in the middle. Below the gap a levelled green walk *c.* 3 m wide runs northwards from the bank, continuing along the contour for some 50 m before turning down the slope a short distance and then continuing north-westwards along a slightly lower contour. Near the north end of the enclosure it meets an east-west bank, turns down the slope again and again continues at a lower level almost as far as the field boundary. At a higher level another green walk runs north-west along the contour from the major east-west bank with a gap and possible flight of steps at the south end. In the north-east corner of the enclosure a four-sided area is enclosed on the north-west and south-west by ruinous stone walls, on the north-west no more than 0.6 m high, with a ditch outside, and on the south-west a stony scarp *c.* 0.7 m high.

Along the river is a series of six ponds, not including the larger circular pool at the south end. Most of these are dry and exist as turfed depressions. They lie on level ground bounded on the north-east by a scarp. At the north end the first is a small rectangular pond with water in it, fed by a spring on its east side. The spring has stones around it and in the bank behind suggesting that at some time it was a built feature. To the south are four further small rectangular depressions separated from each other by low banks. The southernmost in the series is larger, with a dry northern end and a small roughly circular southern end with water in it, let in from a narrow channel to the river. The enclosure is bounded by a hedge on the north, a bank on the north-east, a stone wall and the manor on the east and a stone wall on the south. This stands up to 2.5 m, with a blocked doorway in the middle. Its western end, next to the river, has been brought down by a falling sycamore.

The field to the south of the manor, in which the barn is situated, has further earthworks in it, with a grass track running down the slope to the river, faint east-west banks and a scarp and banks next to the stream suggesting further former ponds. The field is bounded by a dry-stone wall which turns a corner south of the barn. Inside the corner the ground is raised, suggesting a former building or platform. To the south of

this is an old orchard surrounded by tumbled walls. At its southern end is a dry sunken area which may be a former pond, with stonework exposed in the hedge next to it.

The gardens are undoubtedly contemporary with the rebuilding of the house by Sir Rice Mansel, William Bassett and Richard Bassett from the mid sixteenth century to 1600. Rice Merrick in 1578 noted the existence of a deer park, now gone, and fishponds, and also stated that William Bassett made and repaired the fishpond. The raised terrace in the Middle Court must certainly date to the period of its building, presumably finished in 1586. Stylistically, the gardens, with their terracing and raised walk, date to this period and are probably the work of William Bassett, who died in 1586.

Sources

Secondary

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