

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

REGISTER ENTRY

PLAS DINEFWR

Ref number PGW (Dy) 12 (CAM)

OS map 159

Grid ref SN 6144 2253

Former county Dyfed

Unitary authority Carmarthenshire

Community council Llandeilo

Designations Listed Buildings: Old Dynevor castle Grade I; Plas Dinefwr Grade II*; Inner courtyard ranges Grade II*; Outer courtyard ranges Grade II*; Low stone wall and gates to ha-ha Grade II; Fountain in small formal garden Grade II; Dairy cottage Grade II; Dovecote Grade II; Icehouse Grade II; St Tyfi's church Grade II

SSSIs, Conservation Area, Guardianship Ancient Monument; Dynevor Castle (Cm 29)

Site evaluation Grade I

Primary reasons for grading An outstandingly beautiful and picturesque eighteenth-century landscaped park, incorporating the remains of a medieval castle. The site also includes a small lake, two walled gardens and fine sweeping drives. Lancelot (Capability) Brown is known to have visited the site and to have admired it.

Type of site Landscaped park; small formal garden; walled garden; walled kitchen garden and utilitarian structures including icehouse, dovecote and service quarters.

Main phases of construction c. 1660; c. 1757-1779; 1856-1858.

Site description

The mansion of Dinefwr is set in rolling parkland just to the north-west of the small market town of Llandeilo. The Towy river runs to the south of the town and forms the southern boundary to the park. On its south side the ground drops steeply to the flood plain of the river. Within the park, the Castle (Old Dynevor Castle), stands on a prominent crag with a precipitous drop to the west to the river below.

Twenty-two different representations of the place name have been recorded and the exact meaning has been lost in history; Dinefwr could relate to a defended settlement, fort or defensive hill but there are a number of alternative interpretations.

Within the parkland are two buildings that have been known as 'castle'; the old castle and the later mansion. Throughout this text the old castle will be referred to as the castle and the mansion as Newton, which was its title until 1782.

According to legend, the castle was first established by Rhodri Mawr, King of Wales in 877. It was certainly a Llys, that is a court, of the Lords of Dinefwr, who governed Dehuebarth, an ancient kingdom that roughly corresponds to the present area of Dyfed. Dinefwr is referred to as the royal capital and as such is associated with many great and important folk including Hywel Dda and Rhys ap Tewdwr.

The stone castle, possibly erected in *c.* 1151, may have been built by two brothers, sons of the Lord Rhys, one of the most powerful men of his time. From then until the conquest of Edward I in his first Welsh war, the castle became the focus of political power struggles. Following the conquest, Dinefwr became part of colonised Wales, the castle becoming a royal castle in the custody of the constable, answerable to the King's justice in Wales.

The earliest reference to the place-name 'Newton' appears in 1297, although in a slightly different form - Newtown or Y Drenewydd. This new town, or more correctly, new borough, as charters had been granted by Edward I, was situated on the flattish plateau half a mile from the castle; this is the eventual site of Newton house. By 1360, Newton contained forty-six burgages and was constituted a free borough. The Rhys family also had their home there.

The castle continued to be a focal point of the area, changing hands as powerful men rose to prominence or fell from favour. Throughout the late thirteenth century and into the fourteenth century, repairs and alterations to the castle are recorded. Historians are undecided as to the role of the castle throughout the Glyndwr rebellion, some state firmly that it resisted the forces of Owain Glyndwr, whilst others suggest that there is no evidence to support such a statement. However, by the time that Leland visited Dinefwr in 1523, the castle was ruinous.

The new borough fared better. In 1440, Gruffydd ap Nicholas acquired a sixty year lease of the lordship and, in 1454, there is a reference to his house called Newton. Gruffydd ap Nicholas was the grandfather of Sir Rhys ap Thomas. Sir Rhys ap Thomas and Henry Tudor were both descended from the Lord Rhys and the ancient Welsh line. In 1482 Henry Tudor landed at Milford Haven and took his troops towards the English Midlands. Rhys ap Thomas raised an army in South-west Wales and joined Henry at Welshpool. Shortly after Henry's victory over Richard III at Bosworth, Rhys ap Thomas was knighted, appointed Chamberlain of the Principality of South Wales and granted Dinefwr castle. Sir Rhys was to be pre-deceased by his son and succeeded by his grandson, Rhys ap Griffith, in 1525.

Political intrigue ensured that charges of high treason were brought against Rhys ap Griffith and at the age of twenty-three he was executed on Tower Hill on 21 December

1531. The family were discredited and the estates passed to the crown. The survey of Newton made in 1532 still survives in the Public Record Office. It describes steps up to a large hall, with chambers off, a stone tower and a chapel plus kitchen, larderhouse, buttery and wine cellar together with other service buildings including two decayed barns.

In 1615, James I sold the lands to Richard Budd, who left the property in his will to his nephew William Wase, with the direction that it be sold to Henry Rice (Rhys) of Newton for £344; this was achieved in 1635 and the lands remained in the possession of the Rice (Rhys) family for the next 350 years.

Sources suggest that the house described in 1532 made way for a successor that was built sometime between 1595 and 1603. However, recent excavations undertaken by the National Trust in the area of the Victorian garden to the west of the mansion, revealed walls, passages and so on, that correspond with the description and the layout of the rooms of the 1532 survey. So the earlier house was evidently not totally demolished. Donald Moore (*Carmarthen Antiquary*, 1994) suggests that the irregular window pattern at the rear of the house, shown in one of the four oil paintings c. 1670 may relate to the incorporation of the late sixteenth century structure. However, during recent refurbishment work, no evidence was found to support this thesis, although the date of the arrow slit windows revealed within the thick cellar walls, remains a mystery.

The four oil paintings of c. 1670 are extremely interesting in that they show the house surrounded by parterres, terraces, paths and geometric plantings of shrubs and trees. There is an inconsistency in detail between the views and this has prompted the suggestion that they were painted to flatter, rather than to record the actuality of the surroundings. Archaeological excavation adjacent to the present ha-ha, prior to the installation of a header tank for the fountain, failed to uncover any evidence for these gardens. However, trees, shrubs and post and rail fencing can leave surprisingly little ground disturbance and these paintings should not be dismissed because of a lack of positive archaeological evidence.

Two of the pictures indicate that the function of the castle has changed from one of protection to one of pleasure. The castle is shown as having a conical roof above the great round tower. This tower also forms the focal point of one of the Buck brothers views of 1740. A later description (1823) suggests that an adjacent tower was also roofed: 'an apartment in one of the angle-towers used to be kept in order for the reception of visitors, until a few years ago (when) it was destroyed by an accidental fire'.

The conical roof is certainly shown in an engraving by M Williams made in 1773. Perhaps of more interest, the formal gardens of the 1670s have gone, there is a sweeping curved drive, planted with trees on either side, to an unadorned forecourt. The area between Newton and the castle is also shown planted with trees. The house has also been altered, turrets topped with cupolas, or 'pepperpots' appear at the four corners and there are small crenellations along the parapets linking the turrets.

The changes to the house are believed to have been made by Griffith Rice about 1720 and his son, George, who landscaped the grounds to the east and south along naturalistic principles between 1750 and 1780. Estate accounts for 1757-58 refer to work under way

in the park; approximately 300 trees were being removed and their roots grubbed up, hedges were flattened and ditches levelled.

Although minor changes were effected to the mansion, the next significant change came after George Rice Trevor inherited the estate in 1852. Richard Kyrke Penson an architect, surveyor and water colour artist, submitted plans for the re-modelling of Dinefwr in the Venetian Gothic style. These plans, with modifications, were accepted and work began in 1856. Helen Palmer in 'Mr Bundy's Book', (*Carmarthenshire Antiquary*, 1994) outlines the problems and daily management of such an enormous task. By 1859 the mansion had been completed and a description and illustration appeared in the *London Illustrated News*.

Since then there have been further changes both to the house and ownership of Dinefwr. The billiard room was completed in 1896 and offices in 1910. In 1934, the four turrets had to be removed for safety and the crenellations, copied from an earlier phase of the house, added. The National Trust became owners of Dinefwr in 1989, excluding the Home Farm and courtyards. The tapering corner turret roofs were restored on 27 July 1994. Also restored was the family name, on 26 December 1916, Lord Dynevor obtained Royal Licence for himself and issue to use the name Rhys in lieu of Rice.

The present mansion represents the 1857 re-modelling of the house dated c. 1660. Designed by Penson in the Venetian Gothic style, five types of stone are used; the description from the *London Illustrated News* on 15 January 1859, is both informative and enthusiastic. 'The whole of the wall surface of the exterior has been cased with native stone, the dressings and decorations of the windows, the new-machicolated parapets, balconies to windows arcades etc. being executed at considerable cost and labour in stone from the Forest of Dean, relieved in parts with Old Red Sandstone of the district, which is of a hard and imperishable nature. The offices have also been considerably enlarged and much of the interior has undergone renovation. In consequence of some settlements in the original erection in the garden front, which in the opinion of the architect required some support, buttresses of dressed stonework were constructed, the stability of the fabric being thus increased, and the projection attained tending to improve the otherwise un-broken lines of front. The space between the buttresses is filled below by an arcade which gives protection to the garden entrance and by a conservatory above, terminating in an open stone parapet, flanked with octagonal pinnacles. The conservatory is open to the principle staircase. On the opposite side, in the centre of which is the grand entrance, a very handsome porte cochere is constructed, with an arcaded front, the whole surmounted by an open stone parapet, having panels in the centre of each face for the arms of the family. The angle turrets which form so important a feature in the composition, have been enlarged and carried up with steep roofs, and finished with iron ornamental ridges of considerable altitude, retaining the same form and place as the angle turrets, with vanes and cresting appropriately painted and gilt'.

The house sits on a raised terrace surrounded by a ha-ha on three sides; to the south are offices and two ranges of courtyard buildings. This quadrangle of buildings dates from several different periods that reflect the general development of the house. The north range appears to be the oldest and it is suggested that it was probably converted from

part of the early, pre restoration, manor. Additions were made in 1720 and further additions and alterations were made contemporary with the 1857 re-fit.

The north range has four hipped dormers in a steep tiled roof. There is a chimney stack to the front of the eaves with the base of the chimney at the ridge. There are simple nineteenth century sash windows under the eaves, with large timber cross windows to the ground floor. There are two doors with herringbone boarding.

The south range is blank with one hipped dormer and cemented arched entry. There is a steep, modern tiled roof with four hipped dormers to the south side. There is one, mid-roof chimney stack. There are two glazed lunettes and a tall doorway to the stables which retain some of their original fittings.

The outer courtyard comprises the former stables and coach house, that form three sides of the courtyard; the fourth side, to the east, is completed by a screen wall. The courtyard is in the mid-Georgian style and was commissioned by George Rice. The coach house, to the west has a pedimented centre, which stands slightly proud; there are triple arches. The south range contains the Coachman's cottage and Mr Bundy's cottage (although it is tempting to suggest that this should really be called Mr Bundy's cottage).

The Dairy Cottage is an eccentric little building to the west of the Inner Courtyard. It is set at a slight angle to the rest of the structures and has a picturesque, somewhat gothic face towards the main path to the south; whilst towards the park, to the north, it appears more as a Swiss chalet. The north face was probably rendered, but this has recently been removed.

The large landscaped park occupies some 970 acres of rolling ground to the west of the small market town of Llandeilo. The parkland area is approximately oval in shape with the height varying from *c.* 30 m. AOD to *c.* 60 m. AOD. To the south of the park is the steep bluff above the Towy flood plain on which the medieval castle stands as a conspicuous feature in the landscape. To the west, north and east, substantial walls delimit the area of the park, although there is a lodge and drive to the north and housing has masked and destroyed some of this boundary to the east. These walls were completed by *c.* 1774.

The landscape of the parkland is by no means uniform. To the west of the house is the more picturesque landscape, with the tree covered, horse-shoe-shaped outcrops that make up the Rookery and the castle mound contrasting with areas of interspersed grassland. To the east the land has been moulded into gently rolling open land with the occasional clump of trees or individual specimens.

The main entrance is from the east of the park, off the A40 road to Carmarthen. The entrance is flanked by stone piers, to the south of which is one of the lodges associated with the estate. Set in its own walled garden enclosure, this somewhat rusticated, stone built lodge is very typical of lodges of this period. To the east side of the steeply pitched, red-tiled roof is a large stone chimney, rising adjacent to an attic gable. To the north, the larger squared bay window supports the smaller first floor bay. Both bay windows have moulded stone mullions. From the lodge the main drive winds gently above the river terrace until it finally sweeps to the forecourt of the house, which is to

the east of the property. This drive probably dates from *c.* 1770. Today, this final sweep is broken by entrances to the National Trust car park. There was also a drive from the north side of the park, approaching via the King's Lodge. This drive crossed the farmland, with its more commercial plantings, and entered the park via a gated entrance at SN 6100 2510. There is also a sunken road which runs north - south across the park from the Home Farm; at SN 6185 2465 it joins a track that leads east towards the mansion. From many vantage points within the park there are splendid views of the medieval castle and from the castle itself the park can be seen to great advantage.

The south drive begins immediately to the north of Llandeilo bridge, passing in front of the South Lodge. Built into the hillside, this small red-brick lodge, is less grand than the East Lodge, although there is an impressive wooden porch over the main door to the east. It traverses the escarpment above the river, with intermittent revetment walls either side. A branch to the south leads to St Tyfi's church. At the top of this drive, where it joins the east drive, is a wooden gate. The location of St Tyfi's church, at the wooded south edge of the park, is both beautiful and peaceful; within the sloping burial ground to the south, are ancient yews. This small medieval church is built on, or near, the possible site of a Roman temple and to the west of the church Roman coins have been found. Unfortunately the church was almost entirely rebuilt in the later nineteenth century, possibly to the designs of R K Penson. Some medieval masonry may remain within, but none is evident from the outside.

The rolling landscape of the park is broken by areas of woodland, clumps of trees and individual specimens. There are fine oak and beech trees, some conifers to the south and some more recent plantings in the centre of the park. Associated with the sunken road are limes, oaks and sycamores. The clumps of beeches associated with Pen Lanfach, have for many years been a landmark in the countryside, being particularly noticeable from the southern and eastern approaches, but they can also be seen from many miles around, including from Taliaris mansion. The landscaping and natural topography within the park have afforded complimentary views from within, so that, from the house there are wonderful of and towards the old castle and from the castle the house itself can be seen to best advantage. The plantings today frame these views and this may have been the original intention.

In the western half of the park is a small lake. Shown as a reasonably extensive sheet of water in 1838, by 1884 it has been allowed to silt a little, although the Ordnance Survey still records the former, eastern extension as a boundary. In the late nineteenth century, the lake occupied just over 1.6 acres, with a boat house on the western margin. The water held by the lake was used to rotate a turbine in the pumping house, the flow being controlled via sluices in the dam. The National Trust have recently restored the dam, but have still to produce power.

To the south of the house and standing isolated, is an octagonal stone dovecote, that is now roofless; but the walls remain to *c.* 4 m.. It is probably of eighteenth-century date and retains internal brick and slate nesting boxes. Next to the dovecote is a small, almost rectangular, pond that appears to be stone lined in parts. It is now somewhat silted but the drains at either end can be seen. On the tithe map of 1838, this pond is shown as one of three, it possibly being the central, smaller one of the group; a small stream links these ponds with the lake to the west. By 1884, four ponds are shown, the additional

one to the south-west. It is tempting to suggest that the rate of the flow of water was once much greater and that this pond could have been used as a water-cress bed.

To the north of the house, built against a north-facing slope, is a well preserved and recently restored icehouse. It is partly subterranean and partly exposed; the earth has been mounded up around it rather than the structure having been sunk. The square entrance passage, which faces east, is of stone, as is the outer face of the structure. Within is a domed brick vault and the whole is topped with a conical, stone clad, roof.

The exotic conifers within the parkland are very obviously deliberate plantings, probably dating from the mid-nineteenth century (most were not introduced into cultivation before then). The beech is not native to this part of Wales, and therefore the original trees that form part of the characteristic clumps of this landscape must have been deliberately planted. Since then there has, of course, been natural regeneration. The limes associated with the southern stretch of the hollow way, are probably the remnants of the lime avenue. Most of the oaks within the park are *Quercus robur*, the English or pedunculate oak, formerly uncommon in Wales; these fine trees are also the result of deliberate plantings. As most of the trees are very much of an age (with the exception of some oaks and limes) new plantings have now been made to ensure that the parkland retains its landscape quality.

This landscape has been developed over many centuries. The present park includes the deer park, currently grazed by the famous white cattle and which may have had a medieval precursor, and the Inner and Outer Cow Parks, which are to the east. The main developments were in *c.* 1660 when the present deer park to the west was established and between *c.* 1750 and *c.* 1780, when the eastern area was landscaped to more naturalistic principles. Also, during the late seventeenth century an axial avenue was laid out along the main drive, which at that time ran straight from the east front to the boundary.

The park and the estate have always been part of the life of the town and walking on the many paths of the estate was a popular pastime. In addition to the folk from Llandeilo, the landscaped park also attracted the great and good of the day. As well as Lancelot Brown, William Gilpin, Benjamin H Malkin, James Baker, Sir Richard Colt Hoare, Samuel Lewis, George Lipscombe and many others admired this landscape. In its heyday it was universally recognised as a fine and picturesque scene, being included along with Stowe, Blenheim Park, the Great Park at Windsor and many other scenes of natural landscapes and picturesque, sometimes ruinous, castles on the 952 piece dinner service, known as the Frog Service, commissioned by Catherine the Great of Russia in 1773.

There have been a variety of claims concerning the involvement of Capability Brown with the design for the landscaped park. However, contemporary sources suggest that Brown's influence was extremely limited. It is true that he did visit Dinefwr in 1775 and that bills were submitted and paid. It is also known that his plans for the gates, deer park railings, walled gardens etc were never executed. There are, however, two features that are still generally attributed to his visit, these are a 'new' path up to the castle and the beech clumps at Pen Lan-fawr and elsewhere, even these attributions must be seen as tenuous.

The Buck print of 1740, depicting the south view of the castle, shows that the wood of castle wood was well established at that time, including a prominent planting to the east. The stylised perspective view by Williams (1773) again shows mature plantings, but in a less naturalised, formal fashion. The view by Paul Sandy from his *XII Views of Wales* (1777) and reproduced in the *Journal of Garden History* (1991), shows rolling naturalistic parkland with mature plantings. James Bretherton in his aquatint of 1780 - 85, shows again mature plantings, only this time somewhat congested. There is however, one raised gnoll topped with mature trees.

Sir Richard Colt Hoare both drew and described Dinefwr nearly twenty years after the visit of Brown. He remarks on the fine oaks, that as they had been 'preserved with a parent's eye from the axe' and must, therefore, have been reasonably ancient; but no mention of beech. Brown may have suggested some re-planting of the walk to the castle but the actual walk itself is shown on one of the c. 1660 paintings. As to the beech clumps, these may have resulted from his suggestions, but such plantings on prominent knolls were not a revolutionary suggestion.

There is a small formal garden immediately to the west of the house. Probably constructed in 1856-58, this, together with the garden area to the north and east of the house, is separated from the park by a substantial stone ha-ha and low parapet wall. The garden is rectangular and symmetrically laid out with formal paths and beds. The Irish yews (*Taxus baccata* 'Fastigiata'), photographed for the *Gardeners' Chronicle* in 1909, remain. They are planted in regular patterns, two at the base of steps, two mirroring these at the other side of the garden and so on. In the centre is a stone fountain that is probably contemporary with the ha-ha. This elaborate structure is set within a small square stone fishpond. The style suggests the Romanesque or Venetian; it is polygonal in shape and the centre basin is supported by ornamental piers. Like the facade of the house, it is made of several different types of stone.

On the south side of the garden, on a slightly raised terrace and built against the wall that separates the garden from the service courtyards, is a small open-fronted pavilion. This section of the dividing wall is of dressed stone. The pavilion is supported on four stone piers, two abutting the wall. The piers are made of stones that are alternately rounded and square rusticated, all the stone-work within is also dressed. The pavilion is at the moment roofless and this exposure has allowed the erosion some of the plaster-work on the supporting beams. It appears that the beams which used to support the roof were cleverly fashioned. Wooden beams were used to link the supporting piers, these beams were then covered with slates and the slates were then covered with plaster or stucco, this was then painted to complement the stone-work. Wild clematis is now scrambling along part of this structure.

The ha-ha wall which encloses and retains this garden and the house is well built and is probably contemporary with the re-fitting of the house. To the west the wall, which bows out in the centre towards the park, stands to nearly 2 metres. The base of the wall is buttressed and the wall is capped with chamfered blocks. To the east are stone gate piers that hold ironwork gates.

To the south-west of the courtyards are the walled enclosures that used to be a kitchen garden and flower garden, probably prior to the kitchen garden being developed elsewhere. These delightful gardens, now privately owned, are reached by a small passage-way from the courtyards. This path passes some interesting cold-frames that are stone-built. The stone for the construction was apparently re-used; some of the masonry is moulded, the quoins at one end are far too superior to be meant for this purpose and one corner is conveniently rounded.

The two garden areas are divided by a stone and brick wall (brick on the south-east face), in which are five arched entrances and two un-arched entrances. Again, moulded stone has been incorporated into one of the arches. It is tempting to suggest, therefore, that when the alterations were made during the re-facing of the house in 1855-56, the opportunity was taken to re-model this garden and the excess stone from the house was used for the purpose. The upper, northern garden has been used for horticultural and recreational purposes for some time; to the west are low hedges of box, planted in a somewhat geometric pattern. By the arched entrance to the east are a mature Chinese Gooseberry (*Actinidia chinensis*) and wisteria. In the north-western corner is another, somewhat rustic, summerhouse or pavilion, although far less grand than that in the formal garden and on the western boundary is a log cabin. The centre of the garden is now down to lawn, but the perimeter path remains.

The southern garden is still partly in use for vegetables but to the south of it are some un-common trees such as a rather fine weeping ash (*Fraxinus excelsior forma pendula*) and two or three interesting acers.

The Dairy Cottage garden is another delightful little garden that is separated from the former flower garden by a stone wall in which there is an arched entrance. Within this garden and adjacent to the wall is a very venerable yew. The central path towards the park is still evident as a depression in the lawn and to the north-east of this path is a Dawn redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*) which was planted 1954, only a few years after its introduction into cultivation in Britain.

The large, walled, rectangular kitchen garden is situated c. 400 m. to the north-east of the mansion, on the eastern edge of the park and is adjacent to the buildings of Dinefwr Home Farm. In 1907, the garden area of just over four and a half acres is shown divided into three sections that decrease in area from west to east. The most westerly section is nearly 2 acres and contained both buildings and areas of glass. Against the west wall is the Gardener's Cottage. This is separated from a range of storehouses, potting sheds and workshops by a high stone wall with arched doorway. To the east of the utility range are the remains of two, rather long cold-frames. To the east of the cold frames were four further areas of glass, and to the east again was a further, very lengthy glasshouse. All these original glass areas are now ruinous and the wooden frames above the brick sills are buckling and glassless.

This westerly area of the garden is separated from the central area, which occupies about an acre and a quarter, by a massive stone wall, standing, for the most part, to over 4 m. This wall is breached in the centre by the main east-west path or drive, where there once was a gate. At either side are square brick gate piers that stand slightly higher than the wall. The remaining iron hinges indicated that this was once gated. To the south of this

gate the wall has tumbled, but there are the remains of one, possibly two, further entrances, again with brick gate piers.

The central area is, and possibly always was, separated from the smaller eastern area by a box hedge. Today, this hedge is very unkempt, but the girths of the plants suggest that they are original. Also remaining within this area and along the drive and adjacent to the brick lined south-facing wall are various fruit trees, some appearing to be reasonably ancient. The enclosing walls stand, for the most part, to three metres and are of stone except for the internal, south-facing, stretch. To the west, almost centrally, is the gated entrance. The square stone gate piers stand to just over two metres and have chamfered cap stones. What appear to be the original decorative iron gates still hang and are functional.

In the southern external corner are the protruding keystones for the semi-circular wall that used to enclose part of the Home Farm garden. When this wall was removed is not known, but it appears on the survey of 1905.

The Gardener's Cottage is a very curious structure, the pitch of the roof is extremely steep, with attic gables just above the eaves. It is built of red brick, with a decorative course on the east front between ground and first floor levels. The south end is entirely clad in corrugated iron.

Sources

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