

## **OLD GWERNYFED**

<b>Ref No</b>	<b>PGW(Po) 5 (POW)</b>
<b>OS Map</b>	161
<b>Grid Ref</b>	SO 174236
<b>Former County</b>	Powys
<b>Unitary Authority</b>	Powys
<b>District</b>	Brecknock
<b>Community Council</b>	Gwernyfed
<b>Designations</b>	Listed Building: House Grade I, dovecotes and connecting walls Grade II*, barns Grade II, gate Piers, west garden Grade II*, entrance forecourt Grade II*, dry-stone wall - northern boundary, Grade II. National Park: Brecon Beacons. Scheduled Ancient Monument: 17/3728/BR193(POW).
<b>Site Evaluation</b>	<b>Grade II*</b>
<b>Primary reasons for grading</b>	Unusually extensive earthwork and architectural remains of seventeenth-century terraced, formal garden on the north-west of the house with walled enclosures on the south and south-east.
<b>Type of Site</b>	Elizabethan/Jacobean manor house with formal garden enclosures with later additions on the south-east edge of a large former deer park; three fish ponds to south-west of house and relict orchards to north and south.
<b>Main Phases of Construction</b>	c. 1450 on

Old Gwernyfed lies about 1/2 km south-west of the village of Velindre in open countryside on ground that slopes to the north-east. The house is set back from the road, a straight entrance drive runs through two walled enclosures in front of it. The large, stone, slate roofed Jacobean manor has two storeys and an attic. It is an symmetrical E-plan house with three projecting bays which, on the south-east front, include a full height central porch which contains a recessed thirteenth-century arch, containing a wooden door. This door is believed to originate from either Llanthony or

Brecon priories, or from the local churches of Aberllynfi or Felindre. Two wings attach to the north and south, the south wing now stands as a ruin following a fire in the late eighteenth century. The south wing contained the formal rooms of the house. On the north-west front of the house the fenestration has been disrupted by the erection of a large stone stack which detracts from the formal terrace and garden below. This possibly dates from the early nineteenth-century and may mark the transition of the house from Manor to farm house. The south-east facing house was originally rendered but now only in patches. Virginia Creeper covers most of the south-east entrance front. Inside the house a date on a fireplace of 1680, provides evidence for later alterations of the house, the nature of which are unclear.

There has been a house on the site since Norman times and it is the major gentry house of the area. A local Welsh Prince, Einon Sais, lived here and left his coat of arms of three cocks to name the village and to be adopted by the subsequent landlords. A medieval house was replaced by another in about 1450 which forms the basis of the present manor. In the early sixteenth century the house was the seat of Gryffydd Gunter Vychan.

Most of the present house dates from about 1600 when it was remodelled for Sir David Williams from Ystalyfera, near Swansea, who later became MP for Brecon, following his purchase of the estate which included a large deer park to the north-west of the site, south of Three Cocks. His son, Henry Williams MP, Royalist and lawyer to Charles I, gave sanctuary to the King at the house in August 1645 during the Civil War. In the late seventeenth century Sir Thomas Williams, son of Henry Williams, was the private physician to Charles II.

Old Gwernyfed stayed in the Williams family until the 1980s but between about 1730 and about 1930, by which time the Williamses had married into a wealthy Norfolk family, the Woods, it became a tenanted farm following the removal of the family first to Llangoed Hall, Llyswen and later to a new house, Gwernyfed Park, about 1.5 km to the north-west, built in the deer park on the site of an earlier lodge. The family returned to the house for a short period during the Second World War while Gwernyfed Park was requisitioned, bringing with them the stone lions from Gwernyfed Park. Following the war, until about 1960, they continued to use Old Gwernyfed as a summer home until it was leased to the parents of the present owners as a hotel. In 1986 the descendants of the Williamses finally sold but retained the park/farmland and Gwernyfed Farm, to the south, where they still live.

In the south and east corners of the entrance court, immediately south-east of the house and connected to it by stone, forecourt walls, are two stone, cylindrical dovecotes with conical stone-tiled roofs. Their date is unknown but it appears that they have been relocated and raised. Lines in the forecourt lawns suggest that they were once about 4m closer to the line of the present drive and about 2m north and south of their present position. The top third of each dovecote is of different stone suggesting a later remodelling. (Ground evidence also suggests that gate piers between them were also resited possibly in about 1633 when the house was remodelled for the Williams family). The style of the dovecote's doors and windows

suggest that they could be Tudor. The windows in the south-east dovecote have leaded glass, date unknown. Both dovecotes retain their internal slate nesting boxes.

A range of three, large interconnecting barns creates the eastern boundary of the site and of the approach enclosure. They are of stone and timber with tiles roofs. No doors or windows occur in their western sides. The middle barn is the oldest possibly dating from 1500. The most southern barn contains a waterwheel which was powered by a stream running along the southern boundary of the site. The western barn was converted from stables and carriage house in the early nineteenth century. Until 1996 these barns, although original to the site, were in separate ownership from the house.

About 20m north-east of the house is a stone barn recently converted by the site's owners into their private dwelling. The barn possibly dates from about 1800. It has been sensitively converted and has a terraced garden on its western side reflects the fall of the gardens above.

Until 1960 Old Gwernyfed was part of the Williams's estate which increased from 1600 to cover much of the surrounding area, including Llyswen. The family moved out from Old Gwernyfed in 1780 to Llangoed Castle, and in 1880 to Gwernyfed Park, returning to Old Gwernyfed in the 1930s. Between 1780 and the 1930s the house and a small amount of land served as a tenant farm. When the present owners bought the house in 1986 the Williams's kept all the land apart from the immediate gardens, but the owners have been able to buy an additional eight acres back, securing the area of the formal garden to the north of the house.

Gwernyfed Park was built within the deer park of Old Gwernyfed. Although the park of the later house was subsequently augmented with planting in the mid to late nineteenth century the park already contained some ornamental elements the most important of which were three avenues which radiated out from a wood to the north-west of Old Gwernyfed. The earliest known record of this planting occurs on a tithe map of 1850 which clearly records a north and east avenue and faintly records one to the north-west. According to Hyde these avenues were originally walnut.

From the arrangement of the formal garden and formal gates it appears that a main north-west drive ran from Old Gwernyfed out through the gateway in the west boundary wall into a woodland, which by 1888 was known as 'Garden Wood', across the southern part of Gwernyfed Park, 'the Banks' (1850 tithe map), through one of the avenues to Three Cocks and the Brecon/Hay-on-Wye road. The line of this drive is now lost. It is also unclear if there was ever a formal gateway in the village itself. Within the historic boundary of Gwernyfed Park there still stand the remains of at least one formal avenue, the original east one, possibly dating from the mid eighteenth century and certainly pre-dating the house and gardens of 1880. On the south-east of the house a second short formal approach, the present drive, leads up to the forecourt from the Velindre road.

The gardens surround the house on the north-west, west and south and cover about four acres. The entrance drive runs between two enclosures, the southernmost being a

meadow in which a line of young limes borders each side of the drive. The second enclosure is the forecourt with a gravelled carriage turn set in grass. Simple flower borders ornament the south front of the house. To the west there are two more enclosures. The first lies adjacent to the burnt out south-west wing and is a rectangular area of lawn with a sunken central paved path running between two flower borders. Small steps at the western end lead to a rectangular seating area, although there is no seat. Immediately north of this there are three small, mature fruit trees. The western end of the path is overhung with trees, ash and willow.

The western boundary of this enclosure is created by a thorn hedge. A pair of Italian cypresses stand each side of the eastern end of the path and immediately to the south, a large, standard box tree. A sloping grass terrace runs along the eastern boundary of the enclosure, below the west wall of the burnt out wing. In the north-east corner there is a small brick, slate roof lean-to shed. South of the path there is an area of rough grass, the site of a Victorian tennis court. Access to this enclosure is through a small white, iron Victorian gate at the southern end of the west range.

Access to the second enclosure is through an arch, about 2m north-west of the south dovecote or through a farm gate, which retains a Victorian iron gate. This enclosure is of similar size, of about 1 acre, and is grassed. The ground slopes up to the south-eastern boundary wall which runs along the road (see below). In the east corner of the enclosure a steep bank surrounds the site of a Victorian duck pond. It is overgrown, but flowing water can still be heard flowing into it. This bank continues to the south-west where it is planted with trees. To the north-east of the duck pond there is an area of plantings along the southern wall of the south-east forecourt which includes a sweet briar, a young mulberry and overgrown shrubs.

Along the north-west front of the house is a grass terrace, approximately 3m wide which runs the length of the house, about 25m, before continuing to the south-west. The terrace, in the vicinity of the house, is enclosed on the north-west by white nineteenth-century iron railings set with a central small gate, leading to the area below. There is a similar farm gate at its south-west end. From the small gate a flight of twelve modern, concrete flagged steps descends to a roughly square, grass terrace of about 1/2 acre. This is the site of the main terrace of formal gardens, now under turf.

The outline of the garden layout are visible as low earthworks. The eastern edge of this area fall steeply away to the east, connecting with a series of steep terraces which descend down the ground slope into the north-west corner.

About 6m from the central steps, on line with the site of the door of the burnt-out range, a semi-circular slope descends on to the terrace, suggesting a flight of circular steps. These steps create an axis which continues north-west to a pair of ornamental, seventeenth-century stone gate piers which stand central to the enclosure. The line of this axis continues on to a gateway in the site's north-west boundary wall. Patches suggest the lines of walls, forming a square enclosure with central quartering, which connect these gates with the house on the north and south. Mid-way down each

side the walls appear to have recesses, creating seats (this feature was very clear at the time of the survey on the north side from the attic window). There is no trace of the actual stone, apart from some loose stone in a dip in the west corner. The line of the southern wall is also marked by a mature horse chestnut and an oak which may have contributed to its collapse.

To the south-west, the terrace on the north-west front of the house continues for about 50m. It passes above a series of three fish ponds which descend from the south, with a fall of about 6m. All are rectangular, about 8 x 15m in size and contain water. The upper pond, at the western extent is overgrown. The ponds are separated by substantial earth dams. The second and third ponds are partly enclosed on their southern sides by what appears to be a relict hedge line. Hawthorn, ash and field maple all show evidence of laying or coppicing. Near the north-west corner of the first pond is a small, raised platform that could have been the site of a summer house or another garden building. To the south of this boundary there is a relict orchard, containing some fruit trees, of which one apple is in excellent condition. The orchard is bordered on the south and west by a nineteenth-century iron fence which also serves as the western boundary of the site. The date of these ponds is unclear, it is possible that they predate the seventeenth century gardens to be incorporated as part of the ornamental layout.

It is almost certain that there would have been some sort of garden on the site, productive or otherwise, from an early date. The lines of hedges, perhaps incorporated into the garden enclosures, may contain relics of these early gardens. The sophisticated gardens revealed in the earthworks are believed to date from the ownership of David and Henry Williams from 1633, which possibly incorporated earlier existing fish ponds. An actual date of 1604, the date of the wedding of Henry Williams to Eleanor Whitney has been cited (Briggs, CBA Research Report No 78, 1991).

The Williams family, who had wealth and political power, were among the premier families of the locality, are likely to have created a pleasure garden. The north gardens are believed to have included a level formal, quartered terrace, terraced gardens, a bowling green, and various garden buildings but no detailed archaeological survey has yet taken place. What is clear is that the formal garden was enclosed by stone walls with a central axis drive, or walk, that ran from the house out across the park to the north-west by way of one of the three radiating avenues.

With little factual information to go on it is difficult accurately to trace the development of the garden. The Williams's came into a second fortune in the early eighteenth century through an advantageous marriage into the Wood family. Some of the surviving garden features may date from that period. The purchase of Llangoed Hall in about 1730 and the fire of 1780, which destroyed the west wing, saw the removal of the family until 1930. The formal gardens seem to have gradually decayed during this period. A photograph of the south front, dating from about 1890 records no garden in the forecourt area but a wooden picket fence directly in front of the house and a rough yard beyond. The southern enclosures were developed to some degree

during the Victorian period by the tenants, but no details of these schemes survive beyond a rough tennis court and a duck pond which are first recorded on the 1903 Ordnance Survey map. The family, on their return seem to have made an effort to regain some of the lost grandeur. The entrance gate piers were removed from Gwernyfed Park and the forecourt gates from the northern wall. Some of the ironwork may also have been removed from Gwernyfed Park at this time. The fish ponds are known to have been filled in during the 1930s, the present owners repairing and refilling them in the late 1980s.

## Sources

- Primary** Tithe map, 1850. National Library of Wales  
Old photographs - private collection.  
Print of anon. watercolour of south-east front of the house, c. 1780, private collection.
- Secondary** Briggs, S., 'Garden Archaeology in Wales', CBA Research Report No 78 (1991), pp. 150-51  
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