

HAVERFORDWEST PRIORY

Ref number	PGW (Dy) 62 (PEM)
OS Map	157
Grid ref	SM 957 152
Former county	Dyfed
Unitary authority	Pembrokeshire
Community council	Haverfordwest
Designations	Guardianship Ancient Monument
Site evaluation	Grade I
Primary reasons for grading	The exceptionally rare and outstandingly important survival of the layout of medieval monastic gardens, comprising cloister garden and an extensive grid of raised beds and paths. One of the beds is of very great interest in being more elaborate than the rest. The layout was discovered, excavated and preserved in the 1980s and 1990s.
Type of site	Medieval monastic gardens
Main phases of construction	<i>c.</i> 1200; thirteenth century; mid fifteenth century

Site description

The ruins of the Augustinian priory at Haverfordwest lie on the southern outskirts of the town on low-lying ground on the west bank of the Western Cleddau river. The remains, most of which have been systematically excavated since 1982, when the site was given to the State, comprise the church, cloister and its attendant buildings, chapter house, slype and formal gardens. The main upstanding features are parts of the transepts and nave of the church. The priory layout is conventional, with a cruciform church on the north side of a square cloister. To the east was the dormitory, to the south the refectory and to the west a utilitarian range. South of the refectory were further service buildings and the infirmary. Buildings were of local limestone and gritstone. The church underwent two major phases of alteration, the first to heighten the transept walls and the second, in the fifteenth century, to insert a tower at the east end of the nave.

One part of the remains which is of importance to the gardens is a small two-storey block projecting from the east wall of the dormitory. This is a late addition, probably as either private accommodation for the prior or as guest accommodation. It had a window overlooking the garden, which lies to its east.

The priory buildings were partially, possibly wholly, enclosed by a precinct wall. Discontinuous sections remain against the slope to the west and footings survive

below ground level on the south and east. Tidal erosion has worn away the medieval features on the river bank. On the north the boundary may have been the church itself.

The land for the priory was granted to the Augustinian canons by a Norman knight, Robert fitz Tancred, in about 1200. The site was initially unsuitable for building, being sloping and prone to flooding. A raised, level platform was created by cutting back into the slope behind and dumping the material on the marshy ground. The middle-sized priory was typically sited for the Augustinian order, close to a market town. The height of the priory's prosperity appears to have been in the fifteenth century, when building works were undertaken and the gardens established. By the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries, in 1536, numbers had dropped to the prior and two canons. After the Dissolution the priory was partly dismantled and sold to Roger and Thomas Barlow, brothers of William, bishop of St Davids. It remained undeveloped and neglected, partly used for grazing and occasionally for smithying and tanning. In 1981 the site was bought by the Gild of Freemen of Haverfordwest and was presented by it to the State in 1982.

There are two areas of garden at Haverfordwest Priory, the cloister garden and the extensive area of raised beds to the east of the priory buildings. The gardens, and in particular the raised beds, are of outstanding historical interest in being very rare examples of medieval gardens of these kinds whose physical remains survive.

The thirteenth-century cloister, which was remodelled in the fifteenth century, has been fully excavated. It has a small square garden area in the centre, surrounded by alleys protected by pent roofs. These were floored with a pavement, tiled on all but the west side, which is stone slabbed. Between the alleys and the garden ran a substantial drain, which would have performed both utilitarian and ornamental functions. In the middle of the east side was a lower section of walling and stone supports which are probably the remains of a bridge giving access to the garden.

The square cloister garden is presumed to be contemporary with the building of the cloister in the thirteenth century. Around its edge ran a stone slabbed path, along the inner side of which was a narrow trench, which has been interpreted as a planting trench for a hedge. On the west side this trench was broken at the midpoint, perhaps indicating a formal planting design. It was not possible to ascertain if the same pattern existed on the other side due to later disturbance. In the centre of the garden was an octagonal depression, with a precise edge and even flat base. This has been interpreted as the footprint of a stone plinth on which would have stood a central decorative feature such as a cistern. The remainder of the garden may have been grassed; no formal beds were discovered during excavation. Deeper areas of subsoil within the area may represent the positions of small trees or shrubs but these were not laid out in a formal pattern.

An extensive formal garden, dating to the mid fifteenth century, has been uncovered by excavation between the priory buildings and the river. The presbytery lies to the north and the east cloister range to the west. The garden consists of a grid pattern of ten raised beds, separated by narrow paths, orientated north-south and east-west. The area covered is 50 x 20 m. The beds were created not by building up the ground level but by excavating the paths into the building platform. The raised beds are revetted with low rubble stone walls, about 45 cm high, whose exteriors were rendered and lime-washed. The paths were paved in stone. Beds are rectangular or square except one with a chamfered corner and another with a dog-leg, layouts which respected existing features. In the main area of eight beds there is a central axial north-south path running south from the presbytery and three east-west cross paths, in

addition to paths skirting the buildings. There is a further bed outside the east end of the presbytery and another outside, and south of, a late building which projected east from the east range. Periodic flooding and general degradation meant that little soil remained within the beds and environmental analysis of what did remain yielded negative results.

One bed is of exceptional interest in being more elaborate than the rest. It lies in a central position next to the east range. In the centre of its west side is a narrow opening leading to an internal rectangular path around a small central raised bed. The narrow raised bed on the west side had a mortar and stone fill and may have been the base for a turf bench, a feature commonly illustrated in medieval gardens. The remaining raised beds, which are wider, were evidently for planting. The central bed had holes in the corners which may have been for the uprights of trelliswork, also a common feature in medieval gardens of this kind.

It is clear that this bed indicates higher status of some kind. A clue to its function could be the adjoining building to the east, which is the late two-storey extension to the dormitory block mentioned above. It had a separate entrance and a first-floor traceried window, in Perpendicular style, which overlooked the bed. It is thought that this annexe may have been private accommodation for the prior or for guests. A surviving document details the lease in the 1530s of a room along with the garden belonging to that room by friar Maurice Johns from prior Thomas Rogers. The garden in question may be this more elaborate bed.

Sources

Primary

Information from Dr S.E. Rees.

Secondary

Clapham, A.W., 'Haverfordwest Priory. Report on the excavations of June 1922', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* LXXVII, 7th series, vol II (1922), pp. 327-34.

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Rees, S.E., 'The secret garden. The discovery of a medieval garden at Haverfordwest Priory', *Heritage in Wales* 6 (1996).

Williams, G., *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation* (1976).