

CADW/ICOMOS REGISTER OF LANDSCAPES, PARKS AND GARDENS
OF SPECIAL HISTORIC INTEREST IN WALES

REGISTER ENTRY

Site Name	WONASTOW COURT
Ref No	PGW (Gt) 56
OS Map	162
Grid Ref	SO 4859 1083
Former County	Gwent
Unitary Authority	Monmouth Borough Council
Community Council	Mitchel Troy
Designations	Listed buildings: Wonastow Court Grade II; Wonastow Lodge Grade II
Site Evaluation	II
Primary reasons for grading	Survival of the bones of a formal terraced garden with remnants of wider formal planting, possibly of sixteenth or seventeenth century date; fine lime avenue along former drive.
Type of Site	Formal and informal garden; small park
Main Phases of Construction	Sixteenth-seventeenth century; early nineteenth century

Site description

Wonastow Court is a large L-shaped house situated on a bluff on the north side of the Trothy river valley. Wonastow church stands immediately to the south of the garden, and to the south of this is the Home Farm. The main part of the house is a three-storey, five-bay Georgian block of rendered brick, facing south-east. In the centre is a classical pedimented porch supported on two columns, with two steps down to the forecourt. At the west end of this block is a three-storey smaller block with rubble stone walls and small mullioned windows. In the centre of the south-west side are three wider arched openings, that on the ground floor having double doors. Above it is a panel with 'AEDIFICA 1803' carved on it, and flanked by two smaller heraldic panels. At the other end of the main block is a tall, three-storey stone section, with round-arched windows with brick surrounds at first floor level on the east side, a sash window in a bricked up arched recess on the south side, and in the corner the remains of a porch with one column standing and one fallen.

At right-angles to these three sections, extending back from the east end, is a lower, two-storey stone block. It has small windows, including a gothic one, and two arched doorways. At its north end is a separate square two-storey block of stone with brick window surrounds and some further stone gothic windows.

The manor of Wonastow belonged to the priory of Monmouth until the sixteenth century, when it became the property of Sir William Herbert of Troy. It remained in Herbert hands until the late sixteenth century when it passed by marriage to George Milborne of Somerset. Wonastow Court remained in the Milborne family until 1775, after which it went by marriage to the Swinnerton and then Pilkington families. In 1798 (Skrine) it was lived in by the Swinnerton agent, Mr Williams, 'who keeps it in excellent condition'.

There was undoubtedly a house here in the sixteenth century, and the gothic windows, some probably inserted in later parts of the building, indicate that there may have been an even earlier house on the site. The north-south block may be part of the sixteenth-century house. In 1798 Skrine described the house as 'the venerable mansion of Wonastowe', implying considerable antiquity at that date. The house was altered and the main block built in 1803 by Thomas Swinnerton, as witnessed by the plaque on the west end wall. The brick Georgian block may conceal earlier fabric. Barber writes in 1803 that the house was diminished and divided in two, implying that some was demolished at this time: the two stone blocks at either end of the main block may represent the truncated remains of a larger mansion. There are photographs in [A History of Monmouthshire](#) (1904) of the south-east front of the main block and the west end, showing that the central opening on the ground floor was double-glazed French windows. These photographs also indicate a conservatory against the south side of this block, which has now gone.

The former park lies to the north-east of the house on ground sloping down to the east, with a large grove, Parkapella Wood, at the east end. A few isolated trees remain in the fields, indicating former parkland. The main ornamental feature to survive is the lime avenue which flanks the drive, which runs southwards from a lodge on the Monmouth road, at the north end of the park, to the grounds north-east of the house. The lodge stands on the east side of the entrance. It is a small, single-storey classical building of rendered stone with sash windows set in arched recesses flanking a central door with a pedimented porch resting on two columns. Over the porch is a stone plaque carved with a cross and flowery border (the Milborne, Swinnerton, and Pilkington coat of arms). The lodge was probably built in about 1803, at the time that the house was substantially altered. The porch appears late nineteenth-century in date.

There is an iron gate but no piers at the entrance. The drive, which is disused, grassed over and overgrown near its north end, is cut out of the slope, with grass scarps above and below it, and is flanked by a fine lime avenue. The trees, some of which appear to be of considerable age, have suckered to produce younger specimens within the rows. Half way along there is an iron gate across the drive, with a similar one on the boundary of the grounds.

The history of the park is obscure, but it goes back at least to the seventeenth century if not earlier. Barber (1803) stated that: 'the surrounding farm-lands still bear traces of its

park in several groves of ancient oaks and elms', and Skrine (1798) said that Mr Williams lived: 'embowered in the fine groves of this ancient demesne, which, stretching to the summit of a high hill, cover a long projecting ridge, and command all the views of this highly-favoured country in great perfection'. The latter comment implies that the park extended to the ridge to the north, probably taking in Lady Grove, Hunt Grove, and perhaps beyond. The lime avenue probably dates to the early nineteenth century, when the lodge was built, but may be even earlier in origin. The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map shows the park extending to Parkapella Wood, with orchards all around the grounds on the north, east and south sides. These have now gone.

The gardens lie around the house, with a sunken formal garden to the south-east and informal areas to the east, west and north-west. The main entrance, marked by simple modern piers, is to the north-west of the house, on the Dingestow to Monmouth road. A tarmac and stone drive runs southwards through an area of lawn dotted with birch, pine and ash trees and then swings eastwards to an irregular forecourt area on the south-east side of the house. A former drive continues eastwards through the grounds and then through the park to the lodge to the north-east.

A belt of mixed trees and an overgrown yew boundary hedge run down the west boundary. Trees include some large pines and two wellingtonias, one of which is dead. The yew hedge continues to the churchyard, which abuts the south side of the garden. Inside is a row of larger yew trees and some hollies, and to the south of the house two large copper beeches. Dark evergreens - yews and Ruscus aculeatus - line an unsurfaced path to an old wooden gate into the churchyard. Within the churchyard a path lined with Irish yews continues to the north door of the church. To the east of the drive, at the north end of the grounds, is an area of large, ancient yews. This appears to be the remains of a formal grove of considerable antiquity, and could date to the seventeenth century or even earlier.

In front of the house, to its south-east, is a level lawn, widened on its south side by tipping in the 1960s and 1970s. The lawn is fringed by trees except immediately in front of the house, where a former view out over the valley has been partially obscured by seedling trees. Ornamental trees include purple prunus and a tall cypress on the eastern side of the lawn. Below, to the south-east, is a steep slope down to a roughly level area where removal of overburden is revealing the framework of a formally laid out garden. At the west end a gently sloping path leads down to this area past some large yew trees. A little stone edging is showing, and half-way down there are two stone steps. At this level a narrow terrace runs along the slope, partially obscured by tipping and seedling trees. At its west end curving dry-stone revetment walling is visible, indicating that the probable width of the terrace was 3-4 m. At the foot of the bank some stone edging is visible.

Central concrete steps flanked by low stone parapet walls lead down from this terrace level to the lower garden area, where the axis continues with a path of diagonally set bricks of the same width. This garden area is roughly rectangular, with perimeter path of crushed shells visible in places. In the centre is a square stone bird bath on a stone plinth. The west side of the garden slopes up to the churchyard, with two lines of stone edgings marking either paths or beds along the slope. The slope is planted with two

rows of widely spaced large yews. On the south side another perimeter path, with stone edging, is partly visible, and on the boundary is a drop of c. 2 m down to the site of a former pond. The remains of a stone revetment wall are tumbled down this drop. On the east side is an area of brick paving east of the bird bath, on the line of a probable cross path. However, this does not continue towards the centre. A slightly sunk north-south perimeter path is visible beyond.

To the east is a wooded area, now heavily overgrown, with few visible remnants of any layout. There is some *Lonicera nitida* hedging within this area, probably dating to the Edwardian period or even later. Near the south boundary stones visible in the ground mark the top of a dam wall of a small pond, now gone. In the centre is a gap where the sluice was located. Seedling woodland continues to the east, but with the remnants of ornamental features within it. To the south of the former drive is a huge horse chestnut surrounded by yews. To the north is more woodland dominated by conifers, yews, lime, ash, and sycamore. The main trees of interest are the large yews, some of which appear to be laid out in rows on raised ground, and the mature limes. A ditch runs just inside the present boundary of the woodland, marking its probable original boundary. This area was much disturbed during the Second World War, when Nissen huts, whose footings remain, were built on it.

To the east of the house is a level area of rough grass with a weeping ash in the centre and two yews on the fringe of the woodland beyond.

The garden and grounds appear to be of several phases, and parts may be of considerable antiquity. The oldest features are probably the yews, limes, and horse chestnut in the woodland to the east and north of the house. The yews in both areas appear to have been laid out formally, widely spaced as trees rather than hedging. Many large trees were felled during the Second World War, when the house was requisitioned, and in the 1960s and 1970s. Informal belts of trees and shrubs are probably nineteenth-century in origin, and there are remnants of Victorian planting, such as the wellingtonias. The date of the sunken formal garden is problematic, but it is likely to be Victorian or Edwardian in its present form, although in origin it may be much earlier.

The kitchen garden lies to the north-east of the house. It is a rectangular area with brick walls bounding the north-east and north-west sides and parts of the south-east and south-west sides, leaving the south corner open. The walls are of red brick, c 5 m high on the north-west side, which backs on to the coach house, and with curving corners. The north-east wall is the same height at its western end, lowering to c 2.5 m towards its east end. The south-east wall continues at this height, lowering to c 1.5 m towards its end half way along the length of the opposite wall. The south-west wall runs for a short distance to the cross wall from the north end of the house.

The interior is rough grass, and there are no signs of any internal layout. The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map indicates that only the L-shaped area within the walls was laid out as kitchen garden. There are a few trees - a fig, pear and bay - against the north-west wall, but otherwise no planting remains.

Sources

Secondary

Skrine, H., Two successive tours throughout the whole of Wales (1798).

Barber, J.T., A tour throughout South Wales and Monmouthshire (1803).

Bradney, J.A. A History of Monmouthshire, vol. 1, part 1 (1904), pp. 36-38.