

## LLANELLI, STRADEY CASTLE

<b>Ref number</b>	PGW (Dy) 15 (CAM)
<b>OS map</b>	159
<b>Former county</b>	Dyfed
<b>Unitary authority</b>	Carmarthenshire
<b>Community council</b>	Llanelli Rural
<b>Designations</b>	Listed building: Castle Grade II*
<b>Site evaluation</b>	<b>Grade II*</b>

**Primary reasons for grading** The parkland, which was probably enclosed in the late sixteenth to early seventeenth century, retains its parkish feel, although somewhat reduced in size. There is a fine terraced garden associated with the mid nineteenth-century mansion. Within the park are some interesting water features, a good range of trees, including some early introductions, and woodland walks. A fine walled garden and nursery area are associated with the seventeenth-century house, whose site was turned into a garden in the mid nineteenth century.

**Type of site** Formal terraced garden overlooking parkland, water features and woodland walks. Walled kitchen garden.

**Main phases of construction** Mid nineteenth century, c. 1850, 1874, although the park and other features are earlier.

### Site description

The present house is on slightly elevated ground just over a kilometre to the north-west of Llanelli town. Today, the approach is from the B 4308 Trimsaran road, which runs to the north of the castle and its grounds. The land that forms the park rises gently from the coastal plain, being mostly a gentle south-facing slope that rises from c. 5 m AOD to just over 10 m AOD. To the west is the small valley cut by the Afon Dulais and the sheltering bluff of the hillside that is covered by Stradey wood, whilst to the north, behind the house, the land rises a little more steeply to c. 30 m AOD.

Some 350 m south-west of the present site of Stradey Castle is the site of the old mansion which was demolished in c. 1850. The name Stradey is derived from the Welsh Ystrad (plural Ystradau) which means a level area or vale. The old house was indeed on level ground adjacent to the Afon Dulais.

In the mid twelfth century it is known that the English Family of Mansel held lands in the county of Buckingham; the first to settle in Wales was Richard, who married the heiress of Scurlage castle. Thereafter, the family continued to marry into the eminent families of the time. They prospered under the Tudor monarchs, whom they served with fidelity, Sir Edward Mansel married Lady Jane Somerset, daughter of the Earl of Worcester and they had three distinguished sons. Sir Francis, who was the

second son, was the first to live in Carmarthenshire, coming here through his marriage to Catherine, daughter and heiress of Henry Morgan of Muddlescombe. Sir Francis married twice, his second wife was Dorothy, daughter of Alban Stepney, by whom he had several sons. The eldest son of the second marriage, John Mansel, married a young widow, Mary, who was daughter of Sir Henry Vaughan of Derwydd; Stradey was, at that time, part of the Derwydd estates. John Mansel was, therefore, the first of the family to live at Stradey, but he did not own it. John Mansel died in 1657 leaving three children. Henry, his only son, married Frances, daughter of Sir John Stepney and they had one child, Edward. In 1684, Edward married his cousin, Dorothy and when Dorothy's brother died in 1683, she inherited the estates of Trimsaran. In 1672/3, Sir Henry Vaughan of Derwydd granted the lands and all the messuages of Stradey to Edward 'for ever', but the estate was not to stay with the family. On 6 April 1798 Sir Edward Joseph Shewen Mansel died intestate and the estate devolved to his sister Mary Anne. She married Edward William Richard Shewen who died, without issue in 1806.

Mary relied on the family solicitor, Thomas Lewis of Llandeilo, to manage the estate. Mary died in 1808 at the age of forty-one. In her will, which was proved in March 1808, she had left, with the exception of some bequests to the family, the estate to Thomas Lewis, and his great-great-grandson, Sir David Mansel-Lewis, is the present owner of Stradey Castle.

The earliest reference to Stradey occurs in the Muddlescombe archives, which shows that the lands were owned by a yeoman in 1552-1610. These documents refer to 'Straddy', 'Parke Estrade' and 'Park Ystradey'. Francis Jones intimates that the word 'park' is significant in this context, being used to denote an enclosed area or field and he suggests that the meadow land, which later became the demesne lands around the house, was enclosed at this time.

The original mansion, which stood on the low ground near the banks of the Dulais, was probably built by John Mansel, who died in 1675. What the house looked like is not known, but a detailed map of 1805 shows an L-shaped structure, with outhouses and a yard on the northern side, with lawns and ornamental gardens on its eastern and southern sides. These were separated from the parkland by a ha-ha, part of which remains intact to this day. In c. 1847, before the house was demolished, Laetitia Lewis made a watercolour sketch of the front of the house. This sketch shows a large three-storeyed residence, each storey having a range of nine windows. In the centre of the

The present house is situated c. 300 m north of the old house site, which was demolished in the mid nineteenth century. In 1808, Thomas Lewis became heir to the estate and it is recorded that he undertook some repairs and alterations to the old house. On his death in 1829, his son David, decided to build a new house on the higher land to the north. In 1844 he employed Edward Haycock, the Shrewsbury architect who is known to have been involved at Margam and Penllergare, to draw up plans for the proposed new residence. The foundation stone was not actually laid until 14 June 1848, the building being completed in 1855. In 1873-74, the house was enlarged to include a north-west wing and the impressive tower which is some 40 ft (just over 12 m) high. The architect in this instance was probably Buckler of Oxford. It also seems likely that he was responsible for the formal terrace to the south of the house.

The present structure has been designed to reflect aspects of architectural heritage, with elements that have been drawn from the Tudor and Gothic styles. It is built of stone and is one, two and three storeys high. The tower on the west side rises to four storeys and is topped with castellations. To the front (north) is the main entrance,

with a Tudor doorway. Either side of the door moulded, three-quarter circular columns, topped with finials, rise to above the string course of the parapet. Over the centre of the door is a stone panel that carries the family crest. The six gable ends and attic gables give a complex roofline. All windows are sash and have stone mullions. There is a terrace along the south and east fronts, which overlooks the park and former house site. From the terrace are fine views of the park and sea beyond.

The grounds of Stradey Castle are reached from the B 4308 Trimsaran road, which runs to the north of the castle. The land that forms the park rises gently from the coastal plain, being mostly a gentle south-facing slope that rises from c. 5 m AOD to just over 10 m AOD. To the west is the small valley cut by the Afon Dulais and the sheltering bluff of the hillside that is covered by Stradey wood, whilst to the north, behind the house, the land rises a little more steeply to c. 30 m AOD. The parkland and gardens at Stradey now only occupy about 40 acres, the former park to the south and west being developed for housing and more latterly for schools, from the beginning of this century onwards. The castle and the woodland that surrounds it to the north occupy another 96 acres. At the turn of the century there were six lodges, three to the south (there were double lodges at the entrance to the south drive) and two to the north and one to the south-east. One of the south lodges has now completely disappeared, another remains only as a ruin and chimney stack, whilst a third has been drastically modernised. The lodge to the south-east has vanished, but both northern lodges remain. The northern lodge within the curtilage has been recently renovated and is now in good condition.

In addition to the walled garden and service components, there are four main elements within this landscape: the park on the level, coastal lands; the wooded hillside and river to the north and west; the formal gardens that surround the house and the woodland garden or arboretum that has recently been created on the site of a previous formal garden associated with the old house site; this area is referred to by the family as 'The Wilderness'. As far as can be judged, the Afon Dulais, to the west of the park has always been of importance, the water been used for both decorative and industrial purposes.

It is possible that the park had been enclosed by the beginning of the seventeenth century and that the 'Parke Estrade' became part of the demesne lands that surrounded the site of the old house. The main phase of development seems to have been contemporary with the new mansion c. 1850. Certainly by the time of the First Edition of the Ordnance Survey, printed in 1880, all the elements of the park and garden appear to be in place.

The park at Stradey stretches south towards the sea from below the formal terrace of the house. The land is essentially low lying and flat and the park formally occupied a very much more extensive area, some of which is now occupied by the Llanelly Boy's Grammar School and Technical College, the cricket and football grounds and the housing development of Pen y wern to the east. A boundary wall and track which stretches from SN 4995 0132 - SN 4980 0060 still remains from the eastern boundary.

There are few obvious signs of landscaping, but there may have been some improvements, such as the removal of field boundaries, in the mid nineteenth century to give this open parkish feel. There was apparently a public road that crossed the park, possibly on the line of a track or drive recorded in 1880, but public access ceased c. 1850. The early surveys show only one field boundary within the park, this runs east - west from the ha-ha at the south-eastern corner of the old house site. Today there are three additional boundaries that divide the park, but as these are post and wire, there is

no major change to the landscape. Within the park, adjacent to the castle is a small clump that is a mix of conifer and deciduous trees, Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) and some deciduous species. Also within the park, wooden tree guards protect newly planted specimens from the grazing cattle.

The Second Edition 1:10560 Ordnance Survey map of 1908 records a variety of possible approaches to the mansion, although some would appear to relate to the mills and service areas, rather than to the mansion itself. Four tracks or drives were probably reserved for commercial traffic, two from the north, Trimsaran road and two from the main road by Pwll. There were also two drives from the house that ran south across the park and a further drive, running east, that linked the main drive with one of these secondary drives. Today, there are two drives, the main one being from the north and a secondary approach from the south.

The boundary wall of the estate, which stands mostly to 2.5 m, runs immediately to the south of the Trimsaran road. The main entrance is off this road, near the north-east corner of the park. To the east of the entrance is the North Lodge, a two-storeyed, L-shaped, rubble built cottage, with three gables (one with finial) and a new roof. Downstairs are small casements with small ornate diamond shaped lights, while upstairs the windows are protected by moulded drip stones. The porch canopy, which is supported by two poles, is set at an angle between the two wings. Mapped evidence would suggest that the lodge was extended to its present form between 1908 and 1916. Set back from the road are two massive gate piers that stand to c. 3 m, being just over a metre square at the base. They are of coursed, somewhat rusticated stone and are capped with a dressed stone plinth. From this entrance the drive, which has a tarmacked surface, sweeps in a gentle curve westwards to the forecourt of the castle. To the west of the forecourt is the entrance of the south drive.

The entrance to the south drive is to the north of Sandy Road, where there is an entrance splay. Immediately before the two stone gate piers, the level of the stone boundary wall decrease and this lower wall is topped with iron railings. The two square gate piers flanking this drive are less substantial than those marking the north drive, standing to c. 1.5 m. From both gate piers hang the remains of the wooden gates.

From this entrance the drive runs straight, almost due north. Earlier in this century, this drive would have formed the boundary of the park to the east. Today this area is part of the Technical School. There is a small single-span stone bridge over the Afon Dulais, immediately before a handsome, arched building, that served as a granary in the nineteenth century, to the west of the drive. To the east of the next section of drive are the stone walls of the walled garden and nursery. The drive then swings east through the utility yard and over another single-span stone bridge, now restored. Just before this bridge is a short section of black-painted iron railings, just over the bridge, is the entrance to the old house site, to the south.

From here, the drive curves around the west side of the park. To the west in the Afon Dulais, are the remains of water features and Stradey wood. To the east, the park is separated from the drive by an iron park fence and, towards the north, a row of mature trees, including limes and sycamores. To the west of the drive are further mature plantings including a Wellingtonia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*), that is protected from damage by railings. Family documentation suggests that this tree was planted by the present owner's grandfather when he was seven years old in 1852. The Wellingtonia was not readily available until 1853, so it is probable that this tree was from the original introduction. The drive then enters the castle forecourt from the west.

The early surveys record six weirs on the Afon Dulais, the most northerly was associated with a canal that could be utilised to regulate the flow of water to the other water features. The next northern weir was the take-off point for the mill stream, that was used to power the Dulais mill, which was extant c. 1600. This stream is now almost dry. Heading south, the next weir is not recorded on the 1880 survey, although the small triangular lake that retains it is. A triangular island is also shown as occupying most of the lake. Immediately below this triangular lake, is another small tear-shaped lake, that occupies about a third of an acre. Not shown on the 1880 edition, but clearly marked by 1916, is a matching, reversed, slightly smaller tear-shaped lake. This was constructed c. 1900 and is referred to as the skating pond. These two lake are shown separated from each other by a wooded strip of land. Today some water remains in the skating pond whilst the other lake remains as an area of wetter ground and some of the earthwork embankments.

Immediately to the south of the lake is a small stepped cascade, which has something of a rococo feel. The large boulders that make up the steps have been arranged informally. Nearly in the centre of the steps is a divide which is constructed of mounded boulders; within it, in the centre, is a tunnel. At this point the river is retained by stone revetments. Below the cascade is a simple, single-span, stone bridge. To the south are the remains of two further weirs that were used to retain the river, which formed another small lake and a pool. These were separated from the saw mill pond, possibly by a masonry divide. The water management at Stradey worked on both aesthetic and practical levels. The family archive contains an exchange of letters with Brunel, who seems to have been familiar with the site. It is likely that he was responsible for the redesigning and reconstruction of some of the water features, the shaft and the saw mill. Much of the masonry that formed the retaining walls for these features is no longer in place, some chunks of dressed stone and concrete have been swept downstream, whilst the remainder has disappeared all together.

Behind and to the north of the castle is an area of informal walks and plantings that is reached either by the rustic steps to the side of the spring (referred to as a fountain on the Ordnance Survey) immediately to the north of the house or from a path that leads off the drive to the east. As far as can be judged, this area was never one of industrial processes, but there is an enigmatic depression at c. SN 4922 0151 - 4927 0156; this may be the remains of a hollow way, possibly one of the drives that was extant c. 1830.

During the late twentieth century attention has been paid to this area, with some tree clearance and management and new underplantings of rhododendron introduced. The paths shown on the early surveys are mostly still evident.

The woodland area to the west of the castle was associated with both the aesthetic and the industrial. The early survey of 1880 refers to two 'old' quarries, an 'old' coal pit, two 'old' coal levels and an air shaft. In addition, there was the Dulais flour mill and its associated millrace and a water powered saw mill just to the north of the walled garden. Until recently, this area was unmanaged, but some clearance work has been undertaken and the paths and tracks, at least to the east of the area, are now much more evident. There are some fine stands of trees, including mature beeches that were apparently planted to commemorate the battle of Waterloo.

The new mansion was built at the base of and slightly into a south facing slope; substantial stone walls to the east, south and west, retain the house platform and small terraced garden to the east and south. This terrace was probably to designs executed by Bucklar, whose modifications included re-styling the original first floor, so that it became the ground floor and demoting the original ground floor to cellar/basement

areas. To the south the terrace wall, with dressed quoins, stands to a maximum of 3 m, being slightly buttressed at the base. It then decreases in height to the north until the wall stands to c. 1 m at the junction with the drive. All the walls are well built and capped with dressed, shaped flags. To the west, the walls are incorporated into service and utility areas.

To the south there is a perimeter path that separates the small formal lawn from the shrub and herbaceous border. To the east, six stone steps, built c. 1977, link the terrace to a gently sloping side lawn and relatively recent summer house; access from this lawn to the terrace is restricted by a decorative iron gate that is just under 1 m high. To the south of the lawn is a flatter area that represents a lily pond that was filled in when a tennis court was required. To the south of these steps is a further flight of five that gives access to the area beneath the terrace, which at the moment is used for vegetables and a small nursery. To the east of this second flight, the retaining wall continues, although this section is much lower, standing to c. 0.75 m maximum, and is dry-stone.

Set into the bank immediately to the north of the forecourt is a small dipping well, the scalloped bowl being half enclosed by a stone vault. The small but constant fountain of water trickles into the bowl through the mouth of a carved lion's head. This feature dates from c. 1850 and is supplied with water from a circular brick lined well some 200 m to the north-east. The original lead pipes have recently been replaced with alcatheane.

The area called the Wilderness, now a new woodland garden, is the old house site and site of a previous garden. It is a small enclosure across the park to the south-west of the house. From the 1880 survey onwards this oval area of some 2.5 acres, is shown as a woodland garden with an internal perimeter path and two cross paths. In 1880 there was a fountain, sundial and statue, although this probably refers to the site of the dog's graves. This is the site of the previous mansion and the ha-ha, sketched by Mrs David Lewis in about 1847, before the mansion was destroyed, still remains, standing to 0.75-1 m. Photographs of this area in the Mansel-Lewis private collection show slightly formal paths of red ash, to the side of which climbing roses are grown up posts and along chains, with stretches of neatly cut box hedging.

In the mid 1980s there were vestiges of an iron pergola or arbour, which have since been removed for safe keeping. Two camellias and many mature conifers are also survivors from this first phase of the garden. Also surviving, but again set aside for safe keeping, are the decorative railings from the top of the ha-ha wall. At that time this garden was somewhat overgrown. Today, most of the invasive species have been cleared, the surviving trees have been managed with appropriate tree surgery and the whole underplanted with rhododendrons and other acid and shade tolerant shrubs. To the west of the garden and separating it from the wall of the walled garden, runs the Afon Dulais.

The walled kitchen garden is c. 350 m to the south-west of the castle, on the west bank of the Afon Dulais. It is associated with old Stradey House. The area enclosed, which is about an acre, is roughly triangular in shape. The north, south-facing wall is possibly the most interesting. The wall stands to a maximum height of 4 m and curves down at its east and west ends to c. 3 m. The central, higher section is brick faced, with the bricks being laid with the conventional face showing; to either end, the wall is also brick lined but the bricks have been set on end. At the top of the central section, immediately below the cap, are 21 or 22 cast iron brackets that presumably were used to support a narrow roof that would have protected peach trees from the weather.

To the south-east of this wall and parallel to it is the linear cold-frame that was erected between 1880 and 1916. The wall to the west is also faced with bricks set on end until half way along its length, where there is a break in the wall, after which it is faced with stone. The break in the wall occurs where the foot bridge would have been sited. The west wall contains two doorways which lead to the nursery area.

Mapped evidence suggests that this garden evolved from a pleasure garden to a utilitarian one; the first edition Ordnance Survey map shows a perimeter path, with irregular divisions and informal plantings. By the Second Edition, the paths are no longer shown and the cold frame has been constructed.

It is tempting to suggest that the nursery area to the west of the kitchen garden, of just under 1.25 acres, was originally the kitchen garden. The First Edition shows an extensive range of glass against the stable and cottage wall, which forms the north wall of the garden and there are further areas of glass to the east. There is a perimeter path and the internal paths are laid out symmetrically. To the south a row of quick growing conifers have been planted to decrease the rate of erosion from the river. The east wall, which stands to over 2 m, is stone and contains an arched entrance.

## **Sources**

### **Primary**

Notes of conversations with Sir David and Lady Mary Mansel-Lewis.  
Photographs in the Mansel-Lewis private collection.

### **Secondary**

Jones F, 'The old house of Stradey', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, vol. 122 (1973), pp. 165-77.  
Jones F, *Historic Carmarthenshire homes and their families* (1987), pp. 176-77.