

## FONMON CASTLE

<b>Ref number</b>	<b>PGW (Gm) 39 (GLA)</b>
<b>OS Map</b>	170
<b>Grid ref</b>	ST 047 680
<b>Former county</b>	South Glamorgan
<b>Unitary authority</b>	The Vale of Glamorgan
<b>Community council</b>	Penmark
<b>Designations</b>	Listed buildings: Fonmon Castle Grade I; Stables Grade II; Watch tower Grade II

**Site evaluation**                      **Grade II**

**Primary reasons for grading**            Walled, terraced and informal gardens form an attractive setting for this ancient castle, continually occupied since the mediaeval period. The grounds incorporate an interesting small keep which was once set in its own garden.

**Type of site**                              Formal and informal gardens and grounds

**Main phases of construction**            1656-74; *c.* 1762; 1840-78

### Site description

Fonmon Castle is a substantial mansion situated on the western lip of a steep ravine below the gardens and castle in which the Fonmon Brook runs northwards to join the Kenson river. Castellations, renderings and Georgian sash windows give the castle a uniform appearance, but in fact they mask several building phases, from the mediaeval period onwards.

The house, which is two- and three-storey and rendered, is orientated north-south, with a small entrance court, open to the west, at the south end of the west side. Much of the south end is covered in Virginia creeper. The earliest part of the building is a rectangular early twelfth-century keep, which lies along the north side of the court, orientated east-west. The west end of this three-storey block is blank except for a large Venetian window with a flight of steps to the north up to a platform in front of it. Below the platform is a small windowless room with battlemented parapet above and a narrow gothic door flanked by slits. To the south is a lower, two-storey, L-shaped block, with a taller tower in the south-east corner, that was added in the thirteenth century. The single-storey front door porch in the middle of the court and the western end of the south block were added at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The castle was almost doubled in size in the second half of the seventeenth century by extending it northwards from the original keep. On the west side the lowest storey is hidden below a massive rubble stone revetment wall which retains the level

lawn to the west. Between the wall and the house is a small, deep well recently laid out with gravelling, paths, flowerbeds and climbers on the walls. On the east side of the castle, overlooking the ravine, there is a small oriel window at first-floor level at the north end of the mediaeval block and in the south-east corner the tower is rounded on this side.

Since the twelfth century Fonmon Castle has been occupied by only three families - the St Johns, the Joneses and the Boothbys. The St Johns, an Anglo-Norman family, built the mediaeval part of the castle in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. After about 1430, when Oliver St John married Margaret Beauchamp of Bletsoe, Bedfordshire, Fonmon became a secondary residence and in 1656 the St Johns sold it to Colonel Philip Jones (1618-74), who had risen to prominence as a strong supporter of Cromwell in the Civil War. It was he who greatly enlarged the castle with the addition of the north wing. The next major phase of alteration was carried out after 1762, when Robert Jones III married Jane Seys of Boverton Place, near Llantwit Major. The castle was turned into an elegant Georgian residence; it was entirely re-fenestrated, an entrance was made near the east end of the south side and the interior was remodelled by the Bristol firm of Thomas Paty and decorated in magnificent rococo style by his plasterer Thomas Stocking. The crowning glory of the interior is the large drawing room cum library that was made on the first floor of the mediaeval keep, with the Venetian window at one end and the oriel window at the other.

In the nineteenth century, between 1840 and 1878, during the ownership of Robert Oliver Jones, further changes were made both to the house and grounds. The entrance was moved to its present position and the porch built. The former door became a window. The last Jones died in 1917 and Fonmon passed through the marriage of his niece Clara Valpy to Sir Seymour Boothby of Ashbourne in Derbyshire. It has remained in the Boothby family ever since.

The stable block lies to the south-west of the castle, to the south of the entrance to the gardens. A small cobbled and stone-paved courtyard is enclosed by stone ranges on the south and west sides and by stone walls on the north and east sides. The main range is a long two-storey battlemented building on the south side. On the outside it has small arched windows inserted in the ground floor and blocked archways, with mullioned windows above. A slender polygonal chimney in the centre is mediaeval and was brought from East Orchard Manor, St Athan. A picture of the building dating to the 1730s shows it without battlements. On the inside it has a pitched slate roof, sash and semi-circular windows. This range is a late mediaeval barn modified in the second half of the eighteenth century by Robert Jones III.

The west range is a single-storey building with a pent roof. On the outside there are irregular openings and a cut off arch suggesting re-use and remodelling. Along the east side is a rubble stone wall *c.* 3 m high, with a blocked arch and low, probably relieving, arch at ground level. The wall slopes upwards from half-way along to the north end, the upper part having been added. The north wall is similar, *c.* 3.5 m high, the upper part also raised. Inside, there are garages against the east wall and stables with pent roofs against the north.

An eighteenth-century estate map, probably dating to the early 1760s, just before Robert Jones III's alterations, shows a three-sided court, open to the east, extending further north than at present, its north wall level with the north end of the castle, and with a joining wall between them. The tithe map of 1840 shows a reduced court, its north end gone, enclosed on the east by a wall. It is not until the 1878

Ordnance Survey map that the court is reduced to its present size at the north end, with only a wall on the north side, allowing the drive to enter from the west.

It appears that there never was much of a park at Fonmon Castle. What remains is a field and some walled paddocks to the north and woodland in the valley to the east, the southern part of which is more in the character of woodland grounds than parkland. However, a long, straight ha-ha running southwards from the stable block, and now within the gardens, indicates that the large field to the west was probably considered as parkland from the second half of the eighteenth century, when the ha-ha was probably made, until the present century. In the 1760s estate map the field is named 'Castle Field' and on the tithe map of 1840 the 'Great Lawn'.

The entrance is situated to the south of the castle, reached by a narrow lane from the hamlet of Fonmon. The former lodge, now a private residence, lies to the east and consists of two-storey rendered and tiled cottages that are possibly sixteenth-century in origin, although subsequently altered. The entrance has wooden gates flanked by square stone piers and pine trees. To the north the B4265 Barry to St Athan road runs in a deep cutting, isolating the southern end of the grounds from the rest. The drive is carried over the cutting on a bridge and then runs through the garden.

To the north of the gardens is a trapezoidal pasture field partly enclosed with rubble stone walls. A track leads northwards across the field from the north-west corner of the gardens to two small paddocks within it, backed on the north and east sides by woodland. The southern one is rectangular, with high walls, broken down in the middle of the west side, a blocked entrance on the south side and a small building in the north-west corner. To the north are the remnants of another, with only a short stretch of the west wall surviving. In the north-east corner is a small building. The north wall runs the whole length of the field and in the west corner is a ruined building. The field, without enclosures or sheds, is shown on the 1760s estate map and the whole layout is shown on the 1840 tithe map and called the horse paddock. It is also depicted on the 1878 25 in. Ordnance Survey map, with rows of trees lining all but the north side of the field. There are now three ash trees on the west boundary. Formerly there were elms. It is likely that these enclosures date to at least the seventeenth century, when much work was carried out on the castle by Philip Jones.

To the south-east is a large orchard, shown on the 1760s map and labelled as orchard on the 1840 tithe map, on ground sloping to the east. This is now also planted with conifers but contains some old fruit trees. Below is a conifer plantation planted in 1949. The valley of the Fonmon Brook, which runs from south to north to the east of the castle is largely semi-natural deciduous woodland, with some ornamental planting in it below the gardens. This part is shown in an engraving by Jeston Homfray of 1828 as mainly deciduous but with some conifers, indicating ornamental planting already at that date. This area can be thought of as woodland grounds rather than parkland.

The gardens occupy a roughly rectangular area, elongated north-south, to the south and west of the castle. Most of the area is level, but on the east the ground drops steeply down to the ravine of the Fonmon Brook and the gardens extend part of the way down the slope. The gardens can be divided into two main areas: the lawn, walled garden and kitchen garden to the west of the castle and the informal garden to the south. They have been truncated at the south end by the B4265 cutting.

The tarmac drive runs northwards, close to the west boundary, flanked by informal lawn, ornamental trees and banks of shrubs. Trees include three oaks on the west, one on the east, pine, lime and evergreen oak near the north end. The west boundary has a short stretch of ha-ha at its southern end. At the north end is a rubble

wall, now with a visitors' car park outside it, which includes the gable end of a former building. The wall stops at the south end of the car park.

At the north end of the drive it swings round eastwards, passing through an entrance of white painted wooden gates flanked by square stone piers set in the west garden wall and continuing for a short distance to a small forecourt in front of the house. A branch from the drive leads to the stable block. On the outside the entrance is flanked by two evergreen oaks, with a large pine to the south. On the north side is a square stone well-head with an iron arch and pulley and a small millstone over the basin. North of the drive is a small slope up to a level lawn with a row of five yew trees, probably an outgrown section of former hedge, near the west end, along the south side. A gravel path runs next to the west wall. To the south of the drive a large evergreen oak stands in a stone-revetted bed in the lawn. Near the house the ground rises in two steps to the level of the main part of the lawn and a flight of steps leads up to it, with further steps up to a raised platform in front of the Venetian window of the house. This has a low parapet wall and a bench. Along the east side of the lawn is a flower border against a stone wall that is the upper part of a substantial revetment wall bounding the garden. At its foot is a narrow well recently laid out with a gravel path and flower borders.

The lawn is bounded on the north by a hedge which divides it from the kitchen garden. At the west end this is beech. A box hedge then curves out around a circular stone-edged pool. Steps down into it on the north side were put in by the present owner's father. To the west is an iron gate into the kitchen garden. In front of the pool is a large evergreen oak and in the north-east corner is a rose and shrub border with a narrow curving stone path around it. A flight of steps lead from here down through a gothic arch in the revetment wall into the well next to the house.

The west wall of the garden, which is *c.* 3 m high, rubble built, runs from the end of the west range of the stable block northwards, forming the east wall of a small walled garden and then the west wall of the kitchen garden. From the lawn three steps lead to an iron gate in a round arched opening inserted in the wall, the wall slightly raised over the arch, leading to a small, rectangular walled garden. Inside, it is laid out with flower and shrub beds bounded by perimeter and cross stone-paved paths. In the centre is a cylindrical stone column on a square base, possibly originally part of a sundial. The rubble stone walls of the garden are *c.* 2-2.2 m high on all but the east side which is *c.* 2.5 m high. In places they are in poor condition and the west side, which has a gate in it, has been rebuilt. On the north side is a wooden door through to a smaller walled compartment containing cold frames. A square opening near the north end of the east side leads through into the kitchen garden.

To the south of the house and stables is a large level lawn with flagstone paths near the house and flower borders along the east side and against the stable block. A few specimen trees stand on the southern part of the lawn, including a cedar and a plane. The lawn is bounded on the east by a substantial crenellated stone revetment wall with a parapet *c.* 1 m high. Below is a steep drop down to the valley of the Fonmon Brook and from the terrace there is a good view out over the valley. Near the castle the wall is stepped out and between the sections a grass and gravel path and flight of roughly cut stone steps, flanked by low walls, lead southwards down the slope to a wooden gate and a sloping path past a Judas tree (*Cercis siliquastrum*) planted against the revetment wall. The path joins another running along the foot of the revetment wall. At the south end of the wall it projects eastwards a short way, with

a slightly raised interior bounded by shallow steps. Next to it is a large copper beech. The wall returns westwards for a short distance.

To the south is a semi-circular former quarry cut into the slope, with a low wall along its south side. It is now overgrown, with a small, silted, informal pond with stone edging in the bottom and the remains of a small informal rockwork cascade at the west end of the wall, fed from a pipe leading from a tank in the stables.

The lawn continues to the southern end of the garden, but this part is planted with more trees, including sweet chestnuts. The former drive is visible, running north-south, as a levelled way, now grassed over, with gentle scarps above and below it. Along its east side is a row of limes. Parallel to it, to the west, is the ha-ha, now within the gardens, with a ditch on the west side. To the east the lawn slopes eastwards, with a large beech tree at the bottom. The garden is bounded on this side by a stone revetment wall lower than that of the lawn to the north and broken down towards the north end, where there is a gap and steps to a path leading down into the wooded valley. A path runs along the length of the foot of the wall, continuing below the higher wall to the north and below the castle itself, where it is cut out of the steep slope, passing a stone-lined cistern and a stone-lined tunnel (probably a fallen-in former drain) before running up the slope to emerge at the north-east corner of the castle, next to a *Lonicera nitida* hedge. At the south boundary of the garden is a large Atlantic blue cedar (*Cedrus atlantica glauca*) and a belt of conifers screen the road cutting.

In the south-east corner stands a tall, narrow, battlemented tower or keep, called the Watch Tower. It is built of stone rubble, the lower part rough-cast. The east and west sides of the upper floor project slightly on corbels. There are a number of openings: a wide gap between the east and west walls on the north side, with a half-timbered opening above and a square window at the top, two round-headed narrow openings and a slit on the west side, the south side blank, and two small openings on the east side. The building appears to be two separate towers next to each other, with an opening at first floor level from that on the north to the 'main' one to the south. The tower bears strong resemblances to that at St Donat's Castle, which is thought to be late mediaeval in date. This one may have served the same function but its date is problematical and it has been altered; the top level appears to have been rebuilt or added. This may have been done in the second half of the eighteenth century, when battlements were added to the south stable block. The ground drops steeply on the east side and at the north end, to the east, is a stretch of east-west revetment wall, which continues for a short distance on the east side.

Along the east side of the castle is a narrow lawn with roughly cut stone steps flanked by stone balls leading up to a small higher lawn at the south end and to a service area at the north end. The woodland in the valley below the gardens is largely deciduous and semi-natural. It contains beech and chestnut, which may have been planted, and some shrubby underplanting, suggesting that it was treated as woodland grounds. There is at least one path leading into the woodland from the gardens, now rather overgrown, and there may originally have been more.

The development of the gardens is closely related to the main building phases of the castle. There is unlikely to have been much of a garden here in the mediaeval period, particularly as the castle was a secondary residence after *c.* 1430. The gardens probably originate in the second half of the seventeenth century, after the castle was bought by Colonel Philip Jones in 1656. The earliest evidence of their layout is the estate map of the 1760s (pre-1767), dating to just before the changes made by Robert

Jones III, which shows a complicated and irregular arrangement of walled compartments around the house. The outer walls of the present kitchen garden to the north of the house are in existence, forming the north and east walls of a compartment closed on the south side by the house, the north end of the stable or farm block and a wall in between. The west side is formed by the outer walls of the present small walled garden, the east side open and the south side further north than its present south wall. It is likely that this enclosure formed some kind of garden. To the west of the stable or farm block are several irregular, probably utilitarian enclosures, two with small buildings. On the south side of the house the approach runs northwards from the present entrance to a wider court in front of the house. The approach is flanked by a wall running to the south-west corner of the barn on the west and by two walled enclosures on the east, the smaller northern one enclosing the Watch Tower in the south-east corner. This enclosure also appears on the 1840 tithe map, called the Keep Garden. The existing garden revetment walls to the south of the higher section near the house are the remains of the Keep Garden walls and are the oldest garden walling to the south of the house. To the east of the Keep Garden, on the 1760s map, is a long rectangular enclosure reaching to the north wall of the garden north of the house. This is not shown on the 1840 map.

The 1840 tithe map shows what changes had been made by Robert Jones III after 1762. This indicates a general softening to the south and east of the house, with the removal of all walls except those of the keep garden. The west boundary was tidied up and rebuilt as a ha-ha, giving views out over the 'Great Lawn'. The drive continued to run straight to the south front of the house, but now with a turning circle in front and a side exit on the west to the stables, another wall having been built between the south-east corner of the stable block and the south-west corner of the house. To the west of the drive was an area labelled 'Grove, lawn'. From the 1828 engraving by Jeston Homfray it is clear that the woodland in the ravine was also given some ornamental touches. The walled enclosure to the north of the house is shown divided into two unequal compartments, as it is now, but with a wall joining the south end to the north-east corner of the stable court, which was further north than at present. The building of the south end of this wall, next to the west side of the house, enabled the area to the west to be levelled up against it. The small walled garden is shown enclosed on all four sides, the stable block now reduced and detached from it to the south. The southern half of the east wall is thus probably a remnant of the former west wall of the stable block. A wall runs from the middle of the south side to just beyond the stable court, where it turns east to the north end of the ha-ha, where there is a small building.

Further important changes between 1840 and 1878 (Ordnance Survey map) were undertaken by Robert Oliver Jones. He moved the front door to the west and with it the drive, which was diverted to the west just short of the Watch Tower and then ran through a new area of planting along its present course. The garden to the south of the house achieved its present form during this period, with the building of the great retaining wall on the east side of the garden, as far as the projecting 'turret'. This replaced walls shown on the earlier maps in this area, which do not correspond to the present one. The north and west walls of the keep garden were removed to open up the whole area from the castle to the tower as garden, the south wall being extended westwards to the ha-ha. Later this wall was removed, but a little survives next to the Watch Tower.

Changes to the north and west of the house during this period gave the gardens here their present layout. These included the demolition of the north part of the stable court to enable the drive to reach the forecourt and the demolition of the east-west wall between the court and the south end of the revetment wall of the west lawn. The position of this wall is marked by the drop in the level of the lawn on the north side of the drive. The lawn had an informal curving path around it, with informal planting of conifers in the western half. The main compartment of the present kitchen garden was laid out with the central pool near the south side and cross and perimeter paths. It was enclosed on the south by a kinked wall. The southern end of the drive was moved westwards when the cutting was made for the B4265.

The kitchen garden, which is in full productive use, lies to the north and north-west of the castle. It occupies a rectangular area, elongated east-west and is divided into two unequal compartments by a north-south wall which is the northwards continuation of the revetment wall of the lawn to the west of the house. The smaller compartment to the north of the house is enclosed by rubble stone walls standing to c. 2.1 m, with no coping and bulging in places. An arched doorway leads to the service area to the south. The compartment is laid out with two north-south side paths of gravel edged with beach stones. In the north-west corner is a brick bothy and against the north wall is a glasshouse with a brick base and curving frame held with clips and rods. To the east is a brick-based vine house, its glass replaced with PVC. A shallow-arched opening leads into the main compartment to the west. This is laid out with four north-south paths similar to those in the east compartment, with perimeter paths on the north and south. Two inserted doors in the north wall, with iron gates, lead to a track along the outside of the wall. The north wall is c. 2.3-2.8 m high, with concrete slab coping. The outside is faced with larger stones, falling in places. A door at the south end of the east wall leads through to a small compartment of cold frames. On the south side the garden is bounded by beech and box hedges, with an iron gate leading to the pool and lawn and another towards the east end leading to a path to the house. A cider mill stone sits in the bed on the south side of the garden. The development of this part of the garden has been discussed above.

## Sources

### Primary

'A survey of the estates of Robert Jones Esq in the Parishes of Michaelston, Wainvo, & C.'. No date, but eighteenth century, before 1767. Glamorgan Record Office: D/DF Vol. 26.

Elevation of the castle. No date, early nineteenth century. Glamorgan Record Office: D/DF V/6.

Tithe map 1840.

### Secondary

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