

Castell Malgwyn House

Introduction

In March 2006, staff from the Survey Branch of RCAHMW carried out survey and analysis of Castell Malgwyn House (Grade II listed building) and the adjacent Tinplate works (SN 214436), situated 400m south-west of Llechryd in the Cilgerran community of Pembrokeshire. Both sites once lay at the heart of the Castell Malgwyn Estate, created at the turn of the 19th century by Sir Benjamin Hammet, a wealthy entrepreneur from Taunton in Somerset and a banker in the City of London (Fig 1). In 1791 Hammet purchased the established tinplate works (NPRN: 404326) and set about creating an estate centred upon a house (NPRN: 21729) (the current hotel), constructed on the site of, and incorporating an earlier farm complex. Surrounding the house, gardens and pleasure grounds were also established (NPRN: 265113 & 265251), the picturesque walks of which can still be followed along the contrasting valleys of the Teifi and Morgenau. These are of some significance as they represent the work of one of the few Welsh professional landscapers of the period, Charles Price of Llechryd (Cadw Register of Parks and Gardens: PGW (Dy) 32 (PEM)).

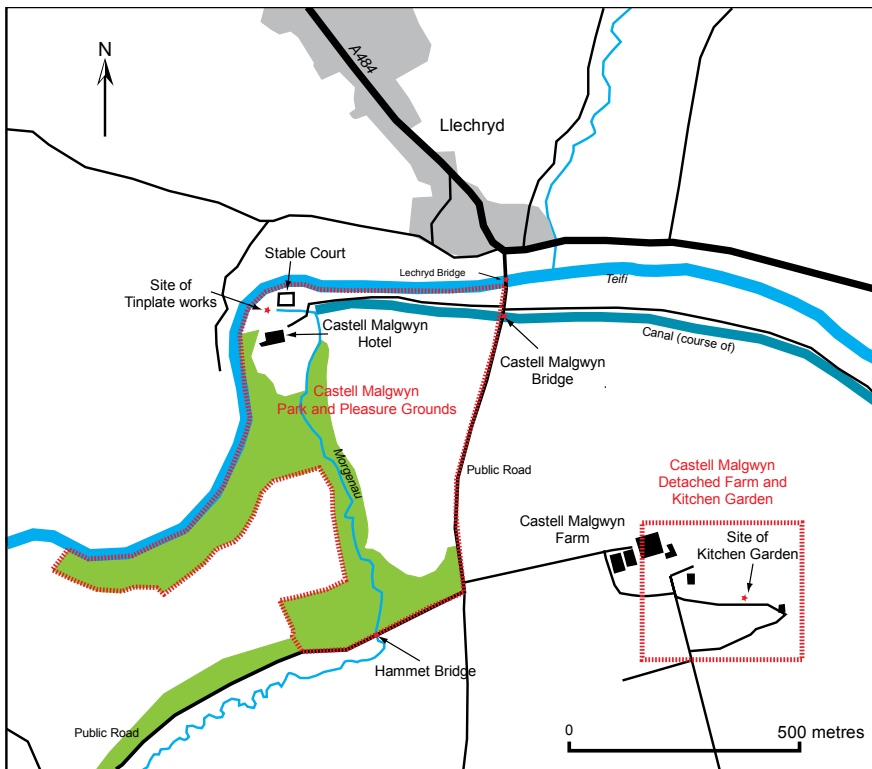


Figure 1: Location Plan showing the Castell Malgwyn Estate

The establishment of the estate required the diversion of the public road between Llechryd and Cilgerran, which originally passed in front of the house. In 1798 Sir Benjamin was granted permission to have a section of this road closed, and at his own expense, to build a new section skirting the estate grounds. This new road was opened in 1800 and required the construction of two new bridges. The 'Castle Malgwyn Bridge' (NPRN: 24247), is situated just south of the main Llechryd bridge across the Teifi, at the entrance gates to the hotel. This crossed the canal which brought water to power the tinplate works, and has two cast iron keystones on either side of the arch, bearing Sir Benjamin's crest of a castle and crossed cannons, together with a construction date of 1799. The second bridge, known as 'Hammet Bridge' (NPRN: 23871), lies at the southern end of the estate and crosses the Morgenau. Here a commemorative slab details its opening on the 21st August 1800.

In addition to the main house and grounds, the estate also included a detached farm and kitchen garden, some 1.5 km to the south-east of the house (NPRN: 265250 & 21730). This survives in a much altered state; although its unusual formal layout is clearly shown on an 1820 estate plan (Fig 2).

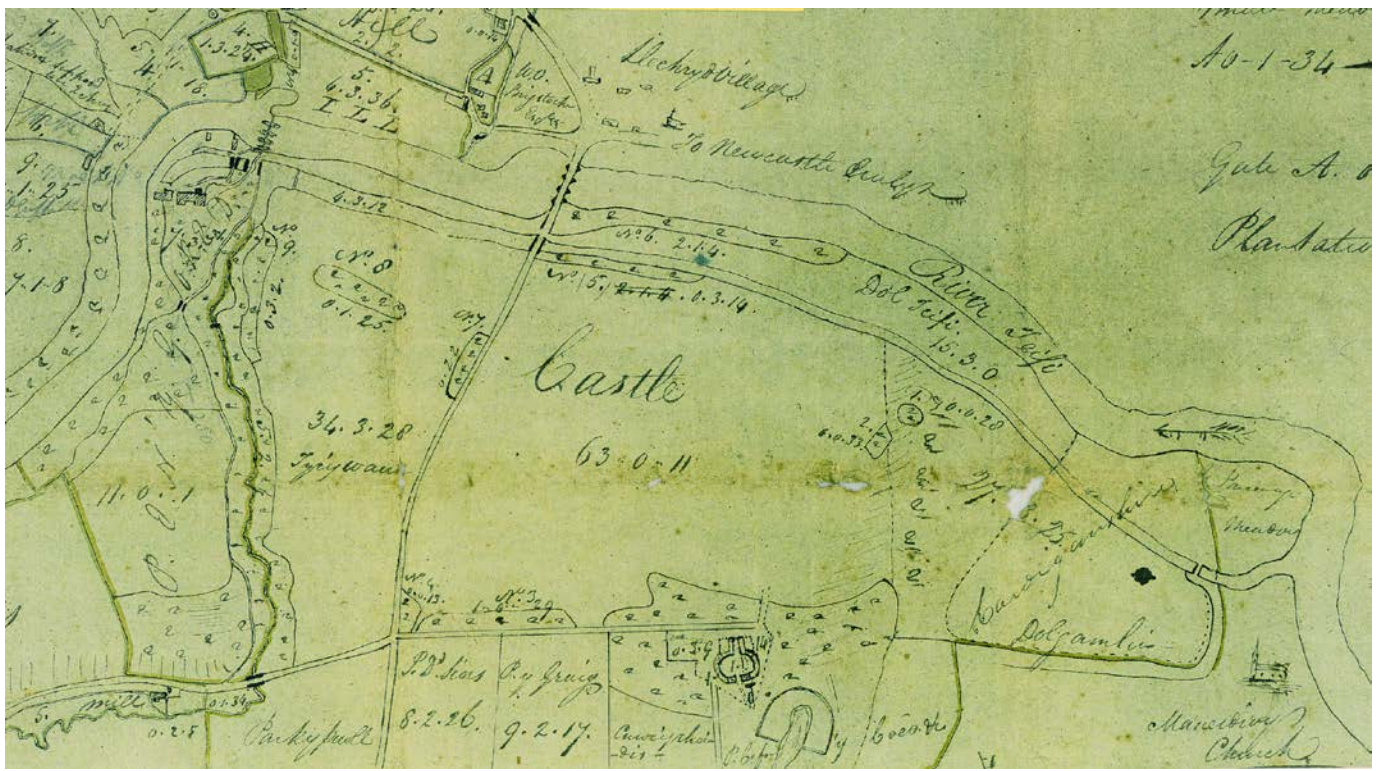


Figure 2: Extract of the 1820 plan of the Castell Malgwyn Freehold and Leasehold Estates (NLW: Cilgwn 73)

History

There is evidence for possible early occupation on the site of the house, with Fenton, who visited the house in 1810 describing how:

'The name of Castle Maelgwn has not been given to this mansion from it being built on the site of an ancient castle, or its having anything castellated in its appearance, but from it being part of an old farm of that name and which it bore with great propriety, as the old farm-house, like the present, a late erection occupied an elegant spot where Maelgwyn, the son of Rhys ap Gruffydd, Prince of South Wales, having found an ancient British earth-work encampment, strong by nature and well placed to keep in check the growing power of the Normans and Flemings in those parts.....In forming the noble farm-yard..many such traces and some foundations of buildings I am told were discovered (1903, 207).

However there appears to be some confusion surrounding this tale, as there are a number of other contemporary sources who attribute the site of the encampment (and therefore the origin of the name), not to the main house now known as Castell Malgwyn, but to the farm of the same name which is located within the estate.

It is clear however, that the site that Benjamin Hammet chose for his house was already occupied by a farmstead, called from various sources Plas, Tycoed y Garth and Penygored (Cadw: Parks and Gardens Register: PGW (Dy) 32 (PEM), the latter coming from its proximity to a weir across the river belonging to the Coedmawr ironworks. Documentary sources for the farm state that c.1400 Luan Fychan resided here, passing the farm on to his son Owen. Owen Fychan subsequently left the property jointly to his two daughters, Elenor and Angharad, with Eleanor and her husband James Griffith-Howell residing here until 1555. Following James' death, 'Castle Maelgwyn' passed to Morgan Jones of Towyn (Cards), who was the grandson of Angharad, and in 1584 he granted a 32 year lease to David Morgan who had been living at Castle Malgwyn since 1576. By 1630 the property had passed into the ownership of David Thomas Parry of Noyadd Trefawr (Cards), and from 1634 was recorded as in the possession of his grandson, David Parry, who in the same year mortgaged it to a David Jenkins. The Parry's had disposed of the property by 1647, and in 1680 Castle Malgwyn is recorded as part of the estate of William Jenkins of Blaenpant (Cards). By 1740 was again occupied by tenant farmers, and by 1766 had been sold to the Symmons family of Llanstinan. Castell Malgwyn was subsequently

bought by the Penygored Company who established the tinsplate works here around 1771, with Daniel Davies as tenant (Jones 1996, 26-27).

Following Sir Benjamin Hammet's acquisition of the property in 1791, it underwent large scale alteration, and was consequently renamed Ty Mawr-y-Gwaith (Cadw: Parks and Gardens Register: PGW (Dy) 32 (PEM)). As a consequence, when Fenton visited 'Castle Maelgwn' (as it had subsequently been renamed) in 1810 he describes it as:

'..an elegant modern building, affording a suite of handsome apartments and most commodious offices, and is pleasantly situated on a beautiful projecting slope, lying between the navigable river Teivy on one side and a retired pastoral stream that murmurs through a most romantic valley, diversified with rock and wood, on the other. The intermediate space as well as the whole of this valley, forms a pleasure ground in the design and arrangement of which, the greatest taste is displayed.' (ibid)

By the time of Fentons visit, Sir Benjamin had died (in 1802) and his son John had taken over the estate, closing and demolishing the tinsplate works in 1806 and 1808 respectively. John Hammett died in 1811, at which point the effects were sold but the house and estate were retained by his mother, Lady Louisa Hammett, Sir Benjamin's widow.

Upon her death in 1824 Castell Malgwyn and the estate were purchased by Abel Anthony Gower, owner of the nearby Glandovan estate, who subsequently let the property. The 'Particulars of Sale' from this time describe a house with a '*handsome entrance hall*' with drawing and dining rooms to either side, '*airy sleeping and dressing rooms on the first floor*' reached by the cast iron staircase, with a smaller staircase at the front of the building leading to the second floor where the children and nannies slept. In addition a coach house, stables and offices are described, probably relating to the four buildings between the house and the river marked on the Tithe Map.

On Abel's death in 1837, his nephew, Abel Lewis Gower, inherited the property and spent further sums of money on improvements, including the erection of the Jacobean lodge and grand entrance, comprised of massive rusticated gate piers, in 1845, the creation of a new garden and the construction of the stable court in 1842-44(?) on the site of the former tinsplate works. The architect of these works was Ambrose Poynter, a London architect.

Following his death in 1849, his widow Elizabeth continued living here until her demise in 1876. A series of architects drawings dated to 1866, and accredited variously to William Burn and David Bryce, indicate that Elizabeth planned to enlarge the house, and remodel it in the 'castellated style of architecture' including the addition of a Belvedere tower, but for unknown reasons the works were never carried out. After her death, the house and estate were inherited by her brother-in-law and owner of Glandovan, Robert Frederick Gower, and were passed down through the Gower family until it was finally sold by Erasmus Gower in 1948. It was converted to use as a hotel in 1962, and underwent renovations in 1978-80.

Architectural description and Interpretation

Castell Malgwyn is a large house constructed of local Cilgerran rubble stone, built in the Georgian style but with extensive remodelling carried out in the later 19th century. It comprises a main block which faces east, two rear, parallel ranges, the southern of which is L-shaped, and 20th century extensions on the south side (Fig 3). To the rear is a service courtyard, partially cobbled, with service ranges on the south and west sides.

The earliest part of the present house is the long range which now forms the rear wing on the north side of the house, and which has been extensively altered and remodelled making its original form difficult to distinguish. The whole of this range is constructed of rubble stone with openings of various forms, including segmentally arched and round headed, with a number of blocks on different dates (Fig 4). The sequence of construction joints within the stonework of the north elevation of this range, together with the spacing of the openings, suggests that the wing can be divided into two individual units.

The western end of the range appears to have originated as a separate building with a symmetrical, three-windowed façade, possibly with a central door. The form of the windows is of original round-headed openings but with later refenestration with the current sash windows. The profile of the bottom section of the original roof is visible in the west gable end of this range, the steepness of which may indicate that it was a gabled mansard roof (Fig 5). This structure has little in the way of surviving original features to allow dating, but its situation on the site in relation to the later house may indicate that it predates the construction of Sir Benjamin Hammet's mansion. Its internal plan gives little clue to its original function, although there is a possible fireplace located at its eastern end, and it could be postulated that this is either a survival of the farmhouse from Penygored farm, or, more possibly in line with the form of window openings, a managers house dating from the tinplate works prior to Benjamin

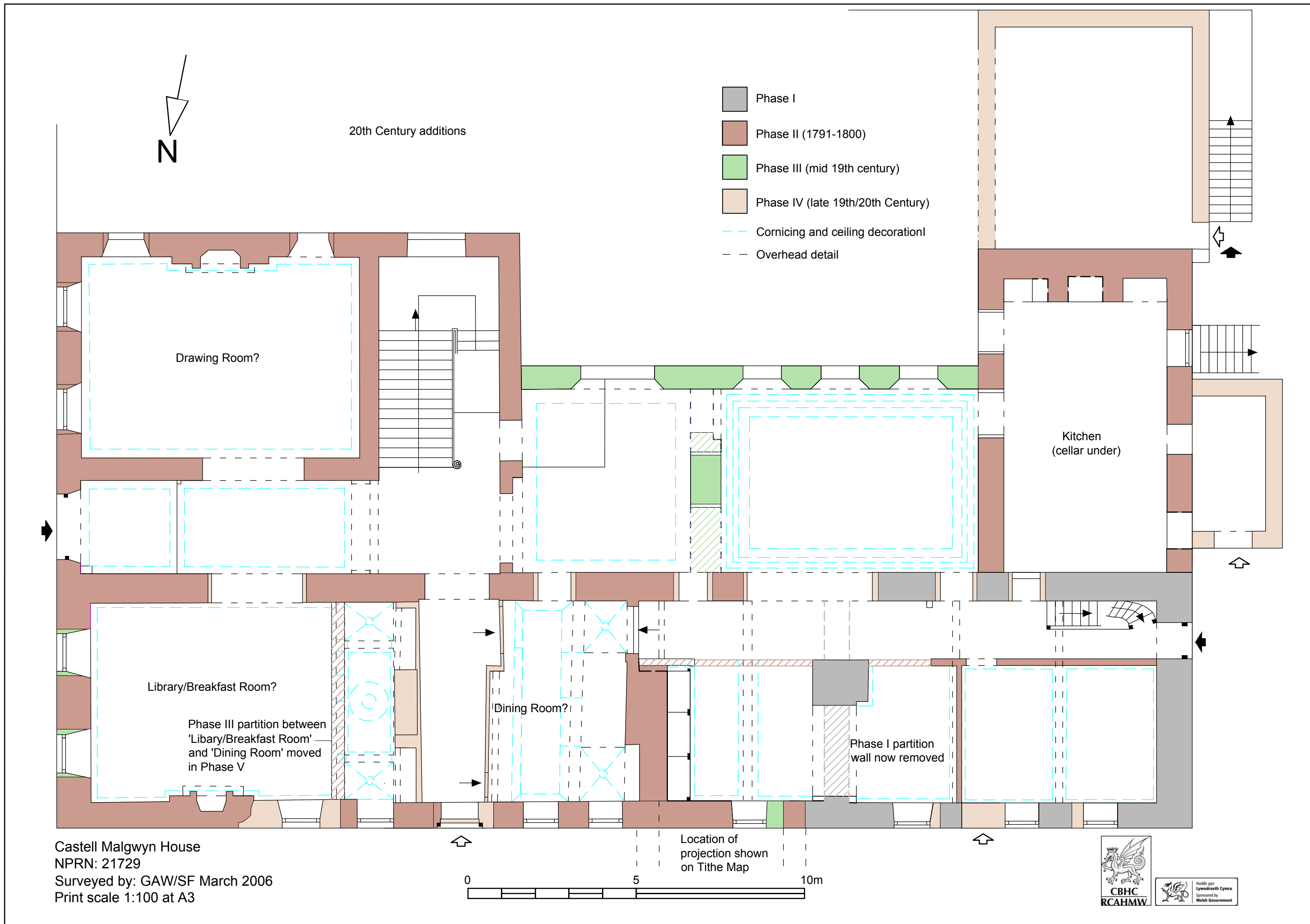


Fig.3 :Ground plan with suggested phasing



- Phase I
- Phase II (1795-1800)
- Phase III (mid 19th century)
- Phase IV (late 19th/20th century)

Location of
projection shown
on Tithe Map

Castell Malgwyn House
 NPRN: 21729
 Surveyed by: SF March 2006
 Print scale 1:100 at A3

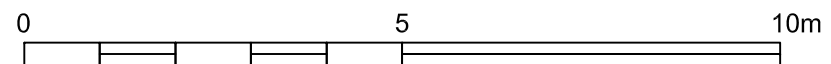


Fig.4: North elevation with suggested phasing

Hammet's arrival. In the mid 19th century the walls were heightened to form a hipped roof with a gentler pitch, and the some of the openings in north elevation replaced with segmentally arched heads.



Figure 5: West gable end of the Phase I building showing the steep pitch of the original roof line

In 1791 Sir Benjamin Hammet bought the complex of tinsplate works and house, and set about a programme of enlargement and improvements. The western part of the north range and the large, three bay block adjoining the east end of it can both be seen as being central to this programme of work. The east end of the north range is characterised largely by window openings with shallow segmentally arched heads, which have also been re-fenestrated at a later date. Similar windows openings are found in the north elevation of the east block, but a clear construction joint in the exterior stonework and the form of the roofs, indicates that the construction of the east block closely followed that of the east end of the north range, but was not contemporary with it (Fig 4).

The east block formed the new frontage of the house, which was orientated east in order to avoid looking over the tinsplate works to the north. The new block was also constructed of local Cilgerran stone with a roughcast exterior, timber cornice and slate roofs, and the front elevation was a symmetrical, five windowed face, with a centrally placed arched entrance (Fig 6). The window openings in the east front have been altered in the later 19th century, but it is clear that the ground floor windows were originally full length to the floor.



Figure 6: The east elevation of Sir Benjamin Hammet's house, constructed c. 1795 and later refenestrated

The front entrance led into a small outer hall, following into a larger inner hall, both with cornicing and the inner with a plaster arch. A reception room was placed either side of the hall, being described in the sales particulars of 1824 as the drawing and dining rooms. That to the left of the hall, now used as the bar area, has a simple double band cornice and a marble fireplace decorated with fluted columns supporting a highly decorated frieze. The reception room to the right also has a marble fireplace, although of a simpler, corbelled, design, and an elaborate plaster cornice incorporating rosette and acanthus leaf motifs. At the rear of the entrance hall, to the left, is a dogleg staircase with a cast iron balustrade and newel posts, some of the balusters of an elaborate floral design, and moulded timber handrail, rose to the left to a large landing window before returning as a narrower stair.



Figure 7: The domed ceiling decoration and cornicing of the c. 1795 dining room

Opposite the staircase a large arched opening lined with panelling, gave access to a large, high status room accommodated within the east end of the north range. The ceiling of this room was divided into a number of bays, the outermost two bays having very high quality plaster decoration comprising a central dome decorated with rings of floral motifs, a feather design at the apex and surrounded by a circle of bellflowers (Fig 7), flanked to either side by groin vaulting with a feather design at the apex. Each section has an elaborate cornice, equal in quality to that of the adjacent, front reception room, including bands of bellflowers and acanthus leaves, while between each bay is a beam covered with plaster imitation panel decoration. The central bays would almost certainly have been decorated in a similar manner, but this has probably been lost due to later alterations to the layout of this area. The quality of this work, and the status conferred upon the room by it, indicates that this was initially used as the dining room.



Figure 8: Arched doorway with traceried fanlight at the north end of the hall, probably originally leading out into a courtyard area

In the west wall of the hall, between the staircase and the entrance to the dining room, is another doorway. This has a similar panelled arch to the dining room entrance, in the top of which is a traceried fanlight of geometrical design (Fig 8). This would originally have been an external doorway leading to a garden area between the front block of the house and a two storey, rear kitchen range which was constructed against the south side of the north range at its west end, creating a U-shaped plan. At ground floor level this provided a kitchen with a deep fireplace in the south wall flanked by low, arched

alcoves, entered from the east-west range through a door in the north wall. Below the kitchen is a two unit, barrel vaulted cellar with arched recesses and small arched window openings (later blocked) in the west wall. An external entrance to the west leads off the service courtyard.

The ground floor plan created within the new mansion is similar to designs that John Nash had been using in similar houses in the 1790s. Nash had developed an arrangement whereby the stair, instead of being directly encountered as soon as entering the hall, was concealed as a surprise until an inner hall or ante-chamber had been reached. Entry into any of the reception rooms was made impossible until this ante-chamber has been reached, and therefore the staircase revealed (Suggett, 1995, 55). At Castell Malgwyn it appears that this form was replicated, although rather poorly as entrance to the south reception room must certainly have been provided prior to the end lobby of the entrance hall being reached. However entrance to the most impressive room, the dining room, with its decorative ceiling is placed directly opposite the staircase. The quality of the detailing used in this phase of construction is extremely high, as can be seen in the dining room ceiling, the panelled arches forming the entrance to the dining room and north external doorway, and in the design of the wrought iron balustrade for the staircase.

In the 1840s an entrance gateway with adjacent lodge was constructed, together with a stable block. The gateway comprised of large gatepiers of cut Cilgerran stone, with central double gates and a smaller pedestrian gate to the north, each flanked by a low, rubble built wall. The piers are decorated with rusticated pilasters over which is an entablature on the east and west sides, and have recessed niches, while the gates are of iron with spearhead finials, a dogbar and a scrolled midrail (Cadw listing description 25/L/7(1)). The lodge is similarly constructed of cut Cilgerran stone, in a Jacobean style. This is a single storey building with a stone transom windows, a large, canted bay window in the south elevation and the Gower coat of arms displayed on the north gable (Cadw listing description 25/L/6(1)).

In contrast the stable block is a quadrangle built in a castellated style, with a tall entrance tower offset to the left of the front (east) elevation. This contains an entrance arch with timber gates, over which is a stepped gable with a slate clock face (Fig 9). The gables to the bays of all ranges are stepped, and there are stone mullion and transom windows. In the angle of the north range is an octagonal turret topped by a slate ogee dome. The courtyard elevations have a series of ledged doors, and in the north elevation four, full height carriage entries (Cadw listing description 25/I/20+21(2)).



Figure 9: *The stable block with its offset entrance tower, constructed in the castellated style*

Similar in style and therefore contemporary in date to these buildings, a two storey block was constructed which largely infilled the courtyard formed by the U-shape plan. On the ground floor this included another high status room with a wide, heavily moulded cornice and a ceiling sporting two parallel bands of floral and foliate decoration. The walls were covered with imitation panelling formed of thin battens nailed to the wall in graded rectangles. In the south wall were three window openings, since converted to doors, and a probable set of French windows, now blocked. These openings all retain full length panelled reveals.

These new ground floor rooms were accessed via the arched door in the north end of the hall, while a corridor was inserted from the west end of the dining room along the south side of the north range rooms, creating a discrete access to the kitchens. The rooms to the north of the corridor were remodelled with new cornicing and panelled cupboards fitted. On the first floor of the infill block lay bedrooms with coved ceilings, reached from a corridor in the original range.

The estate plan of 1820 (Fig 2; NLW: Cilgwn 73) shows a small projection against the north elevation of the north rear range. The scale and accuracy of the map make it difficult to precisely locate its position or its size, but it may relate to the two vertical lines of brickwork seen on the ground floor of the north elevation.

It was probably also at this time that the east, south and north elevations of the house were re-fenestrated with the current horned sashes, the surrounds being replaced in brick. The ground floor windows in the east elevation were shortened in height, and internally they were furnished with panelled reveals, soffits and shutters. In the north elevation, three large, round headed windows replaced the earlier openings, serving the dining room.

In the later 19th century, the easternmost of these windows was blocked, and a doorway inserted. At some point not clearly dateable, the arrangement of the dining room and front reception room was altered, with the dividing wall between the two removed and a new thinner partition built to the west of it. This incorporated the easternmost bay of the dining room into the front reception room in the current arrangement. A second partition wall inserted to the west formed a passageway accessing the door, an arrangement now forming the current reception area.

In the 20th century a number of single storey additions were built onto the rear of the house, enlarging the service areas. A larger extension was constructed on the south side of the house, forming the current 'ballroom'. (Fig 10)



Figure 10: Castell Malgwyn from the south showing the east block and staircase bay to the right, and kitchen block to the left. In the centre is the mid-19th century 'infill' range, with the 20th century, single storey, ballroom at the front

Methodology

The survey and field investigations were carried out by Susan Fielding and Geoff Ward. The house plan was surveyed using conventional graphical methods, with the elevation surveyed digitally using a Leica TCR1205 Total Station with TheoLT software. The final scaled plans were produced in AutoCAD.

The report was researched and written by Susan Fielding, it was commented upon by Dave Percival and Richard Suggett.

The site archive has been deposited in RCAHMMW's National Monument Record, to where applications for copyright should be made.

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Acknowledgements

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Tithe Map and Award Cilgerran 1844

Castell Malgwyn Brochure