

## TALIARIS

<b>Ref number</b>	<b>PGW (Dy) 13 (CAM)</b>
<b>OS Map</b>	146
<b>Grid ref</b>	SN 6397 2798
<b>Former county</b>	Dyfed
<b>Unitary authority</b>	Carmarthenshire
<b>Community council</b>	Manordeilo and Salem
<b>Designations</b>	Listed building: house Grade 1
<b>Site evaluation</b>	Grade II

**Primary reason for grading** The essential layout of park and garden appears to have been little altered in the last two hundred years, although there is evidence for some change in land use.

**Type of site** Small formal garden surrounding house, pleasure grounds to the west, parkland to the south and two walled gardens to the east. Artificial lake now set in woodland.

**Main phases of construction** Probably extant in 1809, certainly so by 1840.

### Site description

The house and gardens are set at *c.* 150m AOD, on the easterly sloping, western side of the Dulais valley some 4km (2 miles) north of Llandeilo and 5km south of Talley. The area is one of undulating pasture rising to upland moor and forestry. It is also an area of ancient settlement: to the west of Taliaris are the earthworks of Maes-y-Castell whilst to the north-west is the Figyn mountain and its standing stones.

The mansion at Taliaris also has an ancient and venerable history. The earliest part of the existing structure is said to date to *c.* 1630, although the construction of the cellars suggests that the present house was built on a previous house site. The first recorded occupants were the Gwynne family which 'owed its origin to an extra-marital venture of the illustrious Sir Rhys ap Thomas, K.G.' (Jones, 1968). The earlier generations married into ancient families and in the latter part of the sixteenth century Richard Gwynne married Mary Vaughan, daughter of Walter of Golden Grove. Later offspring also married into the families of Bradshaw of St. Dogmaels, Gwynne of Llwynhowel in Llandingat Without, Lort of Stackpole and Jones of Tregib.

A survey of 1688 shows that the field names reflected the customs and animals, for example Cwm Blaidd (Wolf field), Rhandir Drysiog (Wilderness boundary), Cae Prydydd (Poet's/Bard's field) Cae Tafarn Bwci (field of the Goblin's Inn). In 1670 the house contained

nine hearths, which suggests that it was then a residence of some size. The Gwynnes contributed to local life, including restoring the church at Taliaris in or about the year 1660, and was in a short time after consecrated by Dr Taylor, Bishop of Down and Connor in the Kingdom of Ireland'. Doctor Taylor had lived at Golden Grove until 1655 and was appointed Bishop in 1661. Two of the Gwynne family also served as High Sheriffs, Rowland in 1638 and David in 1711. David Gwynne, being childless, left the estate to his great-nephew Richard Jones of Tregib, on condition that he changed his name to Gwynne. Richard inherited the estate in 1721. Later, in his marriage settlement to Anne Rudd, 8 March 1722, he also received a considerable fortune and after Anne's brother died in 1739 they inherited all the Rudd lands in Carmarthenshire. It was Richard who had the house re-fronted in Bath stone after 1722 and had set into the wall above the main door an iron tablet decorated with the quartered coat of arms of Lloyd and Rudd on a lozenge and the inscription 'This house was built by the Hond The Lady Rudd and by ye directions of Richard Gwynne Esqr, 1724'.

Although Richard and Anne had eleven children, the estate was not to remain in the family for any great length of time. Richard died intestate in 1753 and Anne survived him until 1762. In September 1760 Edward Knight, the son of a Midlands ironmaster, made a tour in Wales, during which he visited Taliaris. He described it as 'a small neat square house, among a large plantation of Firs, small garden in the old taste & strait canal'. After 1762 the property passed to Richard and Anne's eldest surviving son, David Jones Gwynne, who died in 1775. The holding was then left to his brother Richard, who lived only a few months to enjoy it, and from him to his niece, Elizabeth, in 1776. However, the estate had been so heavily mortgaged that it was necessary to sell parts, and in 1785 Taliaris was advertised for sale. The property was bought by Lord Robert Seymour.

In addition to Taliaris Lord Robert had interests in London and Orford (Suffolk) where he was a member of parliament from 1771 to 1784 and again in 1794 to 1807, when he was also MP for Carmarthenshire. He married twice, the first time to Anne Delmé, by whom he had four children, and the second time to the Hon Anderlechtia Clarissa Chetwynd. He was, it seems, a great agricultural improver and introduced improved methods of husbandry to the estate. A survey of the estate in 1814 shows that it consisted of 3,146 acres in the parishes of Llandeilo-fawr, Llandefeyson (sic), Llansadwrn, Llandybie and Talley. Following her husband's death, the Hon Anderlechtia chose to live at Portland place and shortly afterwards in 1833 Taliaris was advertised for sale. At this time it consisted of 3,048 acres. The property was bought for £65,000 by Robert Peel of Cwmlan, Radnorshire.

In spite of his interests in Radnorshire and in Lancashire, which he retained, Robert Peel, first cousin of the statesman Sir Robert Peel, also introduced many improvements to the estate. His descendants were to retain the estate until 1954, when most of the lands were sold. In 1967 Mrs Peel sold the house and the few acres surrounding it. From the late 1970s the house was somewhat neglected and the walled gardens used for schooling horses and associated activities, it was at this time that the wall of the walled garden was breached. In 1989 the property and about seven acres was bought by the Sati Society who have been restoring the house under the direction of the architect, Peter Holden, since that time.

From the south and east the house appears as an impressive three storey block, fronted with Bath stone on the south and plain brick stucco facade to the east. From the west and north, however, the building reveals its true complexity with a wonderful jumble of roof lines and building styles. The main, south-facing front is by far the grandest. Of Bath stone, it is rubble built at the base with chamfered, rusticated stone from the ground to first floor level. The upper

floors are plain, but the quoins are again rusticated. The whole front is topped with a parapet on which are set four urns; there is a further urn as garden decoration near to the house on the east side. The east side is much plainer, the brick stucco decorated only with the quoins and parapet. A little to the south of the centre of the east side is a large, possibly early nineteenth-century, Roman Doric white painted porch. This is not so grand as the central porch on the south side, which is again a Bath stone, Roman Doric two column structure.

According to Sir David Mansel-lewis, a close family friend of the Peels, the house was extended to the west in honour of the proposed visit of George IV to Taliaris. In the event, the visit never took place and this west wing was later demolished; however it was obviously built between 1830 - 40. Today this area is a small garden terrace. Behind, to the north there is a small, rubble built range with a stone roof, adjacent to a low two-storeyed slate-roofed infill. There were further buildings to the rear, north, of the house as can be seen from the blocked entrances in what is now the boundary wall and the surviving black and red tiles which apparently formed the floor of an outer kitchen. At the time of visiting, re-roofing of the extension was almost complete.

At Taliaris there was a small hamlet of outbuildings, some forming a westerly courtyard to the house, others more randomly placed. These buildings include a sawmill, which was water-powered in a most unusual way; a dairy; a bakehouse and the cockpit.

A little distance to the west of the house and partially hidden amongst overgrown laurel are the remains of the sawmill. These consist of a mix of earthworks and partially tumbled walls, including part of a gable end. This complex originally consisted of three buildings, two rectangular and one small square structure. Also remaining is a brick lined, circular shaft 3.5m in diameter and c 6.5m deep to water level; from the early maps it would seem that this was originally within one of the rectangular buildings. Within this shaft was a wheel or turbine, the metal bearing of which still exists. To the north-west of the site and adjacent to the road is a holding pond, linked to the brick lined shaft firstly by a channel and then by pipes. The water from the header pond was controlled by a sluice (which was not found). When the water was released from the header pond it entered the shaft via one or possibly several pipes with sufficient force to spin the turbine. This would then have been connected to drive the machinery. From discussions with staff of the Welsh Folk Museum at St Fagans, it would seem that this is the only example of a shaft-turbine, water-powered sawmill so far recorded in Wales.

This structure certainly existed in 1887. Information from the County Record Office, Carmarthen, indicates that these structures were built after Peel had acquired Taliaris. Apparently Peel spent some ten years researching how to maximise the output before he built it.

Today, the dairy, a small rectangular building, lacks a roof and is in danger of collapse. It is rubble built of local stone with poorly cut imposts and key-stones for the shallow arched entrances, somewhat gothic in style. Again, this structure appears on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map (1887) so it also may relate to the improvements made by Lord Seymour.

Set in the north-westerly corner of what would have been the courtyard, the bakehouse is a two-storey, rubble built structure that is still in good condition. Externally there are some signs of alteration, including an extension to the east. Again, it appears on the early maps and could be of the same period as the other utilitarian structures mentioned.

The cockpit is a stone structure that seems to have been built on a raised plinth and presently stands to c. 1m. It is eight sided with two entrances and a stone flagged floor. Originally it was probably open to the sky but was roofed when it was converted to a game larder early in the nineteenth century, when the walls were raised and a slate roof put over it. On

the early maps it appears centrally within the courtyard complex and may be contemporary with the rest of the buildings.

The parkland and gardens associated with Taliaris occupy a south to south-easterly facing slope and small valleys that have been created by streams that eventually drain into the Afon Dulais; one is rather grandly named the Nant Thames.

In the details for the sale of 1785 there is an early mention of the walled gardens and possibly the lake; there were 'Two Gardens walled with bricks, four Fish Ponds well stored with Fish, and a Fishing Boat and Boat House'. A deed of 1787 records 'several gardens. pleasure grounds, courtyards and other appurtenances'.

When Fenton visited the site in c. 1804 - 10 he described it thus: 'Enter the grounds by a handsome gate, through a winding avenue, well wooded by thriving plantations of the present owner, (Lord Robert Seymour) interspersed with some venerable Foresters. The mansion on two sides presents rather magnificent fronts, and was certainly meant for a cube the most prevailing figure then followed, but the plan being contracted the capacity of the house falls very short of its imposing appearance in the fronts seen. It has a large walled garden and is surrounded on all sides by rich woods, and backed by a ridge of high and parkish ground, ending in a mountainous summit with broken outline'.

From Fenton's description it would appear that he approached the house from the west via the carriage drive that starts at the gatehouse at SN 6348 2750. This drive is recorded as a track by the Ordnance Survey as late as 1974. Jones, writing in 1968, suggests that the 'winding avenue' no longer exists; this is probably because he approached the house from the east and may have failed to walk the course of the westerly drive shown on the tithe and later surveys. A gatehouse had been recorded near to the house in 1702; this had probably been replaced by the 'handsome gate' of the present lodge which Fenton must have passed.

In 1840 the mansion house and yards occupied c. 5 acres, the garden, that is the walled garden, c. 1.3 acres, the park to the front (south) of the house c. 13 acres, and the 'lower' garden, which was possibly adjacent to the walled garden, (although the tithe map becomes indistinct in this area) c. 1.1 acres. In addition, there was a 'cold bath grove' to the north of the house, a grove associated with Cae waek (or possibly Cae Walk, the writing is somewhat unclear), to the north-east of the house and the largest area of woodland, some 77 acres, which was associated with Dolau, to the south-east of the house. Since 1840, the area to the north, the 'parkish ground', has been used for commercial forestry, although the boundaries of the wooded areas mentioned above are still recognisable.

Today the only usable entrance is from an unnamed minor road that runs from Maerdy to the east to Salem and Cwmdy to the west. From the recessed stone walled entrance, there is a short drive to the semicircular forecourt to the front (south) of the house. This drive has a gravelled surface and is bordered, to the north, by a rubble stone wall in which there are steps to the ornamental or croquet lawn.

The previous approach is off an unnamed minor road c. 0.75km south-west of the house. At the entrance to the drive there is a small lodge and its enclosing wall, extant in 1887. For the next 20m or so the track goes gently uphill until it reaches a farm gate. The track, which has been re-surfaced with chippings, is wooded on either side with a mix of native and exotic species including *Thujaopsis dolabrata varegata*. When in use the drive would have continued through the farm gate, across the parkland to the north of Park Evan Phillip and across a small culvert before entering the immediate grounds of the house. This part of the drive has all but disappeared. There is, however, still a substantial, decorative, wooden gate at the garden

entrance. From the gate the drive winds through the woodland, to the utility courtyard and forecourt of the house. This part of the drive is still very evident today.

The parkland to the south and west of the house still retains its parkish feel. To the south, a field boundary has been constructed in a natural hollow so that there is an uninterrupted view across to the beech clumps at Llandeilo to the west and, to the south, across the Towy valley to the Beacons beyond. It must remain 'one of the finest views in Carmarthenshire'.

Located on the south-east facing hill slope to the north-west of the house is a kidney-shaped lake of *c.* 5.5 acres, Llyn Taliaris. In the sales details of 1785, four 'Fish Ponds well stored with Fish' are mentioned, plus a 'Fishing Boat and Boat House'. Whether Llyn Taliaris is an amalgamation of these ponds is not known. However, by 1840 only one sheet of water is shown. By 1887 the boathouse to the north-east is clearly shown, although it may appear on the tithe survey. Today the boathouse still stands, but walls and roof are in need of repair. To the south is an arrangement of built structures which may relate to the regulation of flow for the header pool, to which the lake appears to be connected by a series of pipes and channels. The lake is possibly part natural and part artificial with retaining walls around some of its edge.

To the west of the house, where two minor roads meet, are the remains of the header pond that once powered the sawmill. Today the dam has been breached and the area is becoming overgrown, but some walling still remains. There were two outlets from this pond, one to the east was channelled and piped to the mill, the other, heading almost due south, was the overflow leat. This overflow still carries water.

Associated with the mill and flowing south from it are two stone-lined, partially culvetted, drains. These drains are both utilitarian and decorative. Where their south-easterly course meets the parkland of Park Evan Phillip at SN 6396 2788, there is a substantial earthwork that formed the retaining bank for the leat that took all the water away to the south-west. In 1887 a track used to run along the top of this earthwork.

It is probable that the layout of the gardens has changed little over the last one hundred and fifty years or so. The 'garden in the old taste' noted by Edward Knight in 1760 has long since gone, but its structure probably remains. Of the 'strait canal' that he mentioned there is no trace. Upon entering the grounds from the east the walled garden and lower garden are on the left (that is, to the south). To the north is the retaining wall for the decorative lawn or croquet lawn, measuring *c.* 13 x 30m, which is bordered to the north by very small, grassed, terraces. These are shown as flower borders in 1887. In the north-eastern corner of the upper terrace is a conservatory, now a UPVC structure, but on the site of and a similar design to, its wooden precursor. Immediately to the east of the conservatory and used to gain access to it, is a small curving flight of stone steps. To either side of the steps are yews which form a slightly straggly arch.

To the west of the house was the area referred to in the sales documents as the pleasure grounds, in the northern area of which was the mill. Today this area is much overgrown with laurel, but some *Rhododendron ponticum* and hardy hybrids have managed to compete and apparently still flower. There are mature lime, beech and oak trees and two fine pines in this area. The beech trees have been allowed to regenerate naturally and where sufficient space and light allows, beech saplings form a 'herb' layer.

To the south-east of the house is a walled area enclosing *c.* 1.75 acres. The shape is irregular, forming more of a triangle than a rectangle. This triangle is further divided by a wall running approximately east to west, forming another triangular area. There is a further subdivision to the south east of the enclosed area forming yet another irregular area.

The walls, which stand to a maximum height of *c.* 2.5 - 3m are of stone on the outside, with the internal south-facing, north wall being brick fronted. To the north is a pedestrian, arched entrance, but this is the result of modification. In the walls to either side of the existing door are straight vertical joints in the masonry, the returns for a previous, wider, entrance. Also on the inside of the north wall is the low, brick built base of what has been interpreted by the present owners as cold frames. However, it is very much more likely that this would have been the base of a small glasshouse as the outside of this wall contains the remains of what might have been a heating flue.

A vehicular entrance was made in the east wall, linking the garden to the road, in the last ten years or so. The present owners have done their best to neaten and repoint the returns and have had two wooden gates made to secure the entrance.

Within this top section of the walled garden plots have been laid out. There has been no attempt to emulate the original design as shown on the early survey. In this (1887) survey the paths, like the shape of the garden itself, were apparently irregular, with two parallel paths towards the eastern side and an internal perimeter path towards the west. Towards the southern end of this top garden a new orchard has been planted and there are several pear trees trained against the east wall. Also within this area are three modern summer houses or day-houses used by the society members as places of retreat and meditation.

Associated with the dividing wall and to the south of it are the remains of the stone built tool sheds and gardener's bothy. Immediately to the east of this ruin the wall has been breached so that there is presently a path to the lower area. This area is used as a car park for society members, the previous occupants having laid an 'all-weather' surface to be used by the riding school. Detail on the early maps suggest that this was once the orchard. In the southern perimeter wall, to the west, is an arched, pedestrian entrance that would have given access to the parkland and external path. In the western end of the internal dividing wall is an original gateway between the two areas.

To the east of the lower area is a further small enclosed area. The purpose of this enclosure is not known. Within the north-south dividing wall is an iron fire-basket, although no structure is shown in this area in 1905.

## **Sources**

### **Primary**

Smith P, (1985) Notes held in the National Monuments Record, Aberystwyth.  
Tithe map and schedule of apportionments (1840) Nos 2176 - 2210.  
Carmarthen Record Office, Taliaris Collection, No 355.

### **Secondary**

Fenton R, *Tours in Wales, 1804 - 1813*, (1917), ed J Fisher, Cambrian Archaeological Association supplement, pp. 54-55.

Fenton's *Tours in Wales*, reproduced in *Transactions of the Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society and Field Club* (1917 - 18), vol. 12, p. 37.

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