

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

REGISTER ENTRY

MONKTON OLD HALL AND VICARAGE GARDENS

Ref number PGW (Dy) 40 (PEM)

OS Map 158

Grid ref SM 981 014

Former county Dyfed

Unitary authority Pembrokeshire

Community council Pembroke

Designations Listed buildings: Monkton Old Hall (Grade I); Priory church of St Nicholas (Grade I); South-west and south-east churchyard walls to Priory church of St Nicholas (Grade II); South retaining and garden wall to Monkton Old Hall (Grade II)
Conservation Area: Pembroke

Site evaluation Grade II*

Primary reasons for grading The survival of a compartmented and terraced garden in an exceptionally fine position overlooking Pembroke Castle. The garden is associated with the medieval priory and parts probably date to this period, making them a very rare example of a walled medieval garden. The terraces probably date to the mid nineteenth century.

Type of site Walled and compartmented garden, with a series of terraces

Main phases of construction Fourteenth century; mid nineteenth century; 1933-78

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Site description

Monkton Old Hall is a substantial medieval house situated on the eastern edge of the village of Monkton, just west of Pembroke. The house is built on a rock outcrop, with steep drops below it to the south and east. On the east side the ground drops down to a sea inlet, Monkton Pill, beyond which is Pembroke Castle. The house is three-storey and T-shaped, the 'foot' of the T projecting westwards. It is built of stone, with pitched slate roofs. In the basement is a large, vaulted undercroft. Above, a large, two-

storey hall occupies the west wing. The entrance is in the middle of the north side and has a circular Flemish chimney immediately to its south.

Monkton Old Hall is thought to date from the fourteenth century and is built in the style of a north French semi-fortified house. It is thought to have originated as the guest house, or *hospitium* of the adjacent priory of St Nicholas. The priory was an alien, Benedictine, one, founded in 1098, when Arnulph de Montgomery gave a church and land to the abbey of Seez, in Normandy. The abbey was closed down in 1414 and became a possession of the Crown. In 1443 it was given to St Alban's Abbey, Hertfordshire and remained their cell until it was dissolved in 1539. It was then sold to a local lawyer, John Vaughan, from whom it passed to Walter Devereux, Viscount Hereford (later 1st earl of Essex). It remained in the Devereux family for over two centuries, during which time it was leased out to minor gentry families. By the eighteenth century it had degenerated into a farmhouse.

The earliest description of Monkton Old Hall is by Fenton, in his *Tour* of 1811, when the house was a farmhouse, which he assumed was originally the prior's lodging: 'the outbuildings, together with the walls that enclosed the whole, give us an idea of the prior's great state. The monastic precinct, or rather the prior's liberties, occupying a very large tract, formed a paddock well walled round, commanding a fine view of the estuary, castle and town of Pembroke and must have been a sumptuous and delightful residence. A dove-house of large dimensions ... still exists entire just without this paddock'. The outbuildings and dovecot, to the west of the church, are now in a ruinous state.

From the nineteenth century onwards the property has undergone three cycles of decay and renewal. In 1814 Sir John Owen of Orielson bought the property and he or his son sold it in 1857 to Sir Thomas Meyrick of Bush. There is evidence that the house was re-roofed in 1819 but later it appears to have been in a poor state: in 1868 the Revd E.L. Barnwell noted 'its present neglected condition'. In 1879 a wealthy romantic, J.R. Cobb, who restored several medieval castles in south Wales, took a lease of the property and began a programme of careful restoration. The roof had fallen in, original partitions had been removed, others added and walls were in poor condition. Cobb restored the building 'as faithfully as circumstances would admit, though not quite to his satisfaction'. After his death in 1897 the house was used by the village for various purposes and was left to deteriorate again.

The next saviour was Miss Muriel Thompson, gardening correspondent of *Everywoman* magazine and also a romantic. She bought Monkton Old Hall in 1933 but did not make it her permanent home until after the Second World War. Although impecunious she carried out restoration work, asking Clough Williams-Ellis for advice in 1950. In the early 1960s she married Air Commodore Bowen. On her death in 1978 the property was left to Mrs Oran Campbell, who passed it to the Landmark Trust. The Trust has carried out a major programme of restoration on the house, including the demolition of a small Victorian wing on the north-west side of the house.

The gardens associated with Monkton Old Hall and the Vicarage of the church of St Nicholas lie to the north of the Hall and east of the Vicarage. To their west is the walled churchyard. The ground is level in the upper compartments, on the west side of the gardens, and then slopes steeply to the east down to the shore of Monkton Pill. Although the gardens belonging to Monkton Old Hall and the Vicarage are now separate, with no intercommunication, they were originally both part of the monastic precinct and are therefore treated as a single entity here.

The entrance to the grounds of Monkton Old Hall is to the west of the house, off Church Terrace, which runs along the south side of the property. Square stone piers, with pyramidal tops, and slightly lower rubble stone walls flank the wooden entrance gates. Inside is a small tarmac forecourt bounded on the north and south by shrub borders. In the north border is a myrtle grown from a sprig in the Queen Mother's wedding bouquet, given to Miss Thompson. The forecourt is bounded on the east side by a low stone wall. Two stone steps lead down to a small lawn and a gravel path runs eastward to a flight of four stone steps up to a flagstone court on the north side of the house. The court is bounded on the west by stone walls with tapered tops.

A substantial rubble stone revetment wall, with a low parapet, bounds the south side of the property and between it and the house is a narrow lawn, reached from the west by a flight of steps. At the east end of the lawn is a further flight of three steps and then a very steep and narrow flight down to a doorway, with a pointed arch, on to the lane. East of the house, two steps lead up to a small grass terrace. Below, to the east, the ground slopes gently down to a revetment wall without parapet, below which are derelict ground and small stone outbuildings. On the north side of the terrace is a wall about 1.6 m high. Originally there was a narrow flight of steps along its south side leading down to a doorway, now blocked, on Bridgend Terrace, below the garden. A flight of steps leads up to the paved court north of the house.

The main garden area lies north of the house. In front of the paved court is a small walled compartment. Its walls, and all those in the rest of the gardens, are of mortared rubble stone. The compartment consists of a lawn with a central flagstone path leading to a doorway, with pointed arch, in the north wall, which is about 3.3 m high. On the east side the compartment is bounded by a wall about 1.3 m high on the edge of the steep drop on this side. The west wall, which is the churchyard boundary wall, is about 3.2 - 3.5 m high. In the north-west corner is a small, single-storey stone building with a pent roof, now used as a garden shed. The doorway in the north wall leads to the main terrace.

The main terrace is a rectangular walled compartment, its long axis running north-south and its east and west walls being continuations of those of the compartment to the south and of similar build and height. The north wall is about 3.5 m high. The terrace is supported on the east side by a revetment wall about 5 m high. The terrace consists of a lawn, bounded on the west by a shrub border and on the east by an old flower and shrub bed which is in the process of being removed. At the north end is a circular flowerbed, now planted with herbs, bounded by a random flagstone path. A flagstone path crosses the middle of the bed and four flagstone paths radiate out from the circular path. That to the east leads to a wooden gate to a flight of steps to a series of terraces below. From the platform just outside the gate there is a very fine view of Pembroke Castle and town.

A series of three terraces lie directly below the main terrace, enclosed in a walled compartment, the north and south walls of which are continuations of those of the terrace above. The south wall is about 1.2 m high. A long flight of 22 uneven and well worn stone steps, with a low parapet, leads down the upper terrace revetment wall to the top of the central east-west axial path down the terraces. Two more steps, on this axis, lead down to the first terrace. This is about 4.5 m wide, with no parapet on its lower side. The terrace has been cleared of vegetation, except for a few ornamental trees, the principal ones being a magnolia at the north end and a variety of cherries. There are also some large buddleia bushes. Underneath the steps is a storage space. A flight of fourteen steps leads down to the second terrace.

The upper part of this terrace is sloping, the lower part level. A stone-edged path runs along the foot of the revetment wall, which is about 1.2 m high. The path continues along the north side, with a stone-edged border next to the wall. Lilac and viburnum bushes grow on the lower side. The perimeter path is visible as a slightly sunken linear feature along the south and east sides of the terrace. Both halves of the terrace, on either side of the central path, have the same layout. Flanking the central path are two large, decaying cherry trees. The sloping part of the terrace is ridged up and down the slope, suggesting former vegetable production or an asparagus bed. In the lower part of the terrace a flight of sixteen steps, leading to the third and lowest terrace, begins.

The lowest level slopes down towards the east and was probably an orchard, at least within the last century, as a number of old fruit trees remain in it. It is backed by the revetment wall of the terrace above, which is about 2.1 m high. A perimeter path, just visible, runs around the edge of the terrace. A large bush of *Lonicera nitida* grows against the south wall. There is no wall on the east side and a modern garage is built against the revetment wall. On the north side there is a small, narrow doorway leading out of the garden at the east end of the wall.

The garden and paddock of the present Vicarage are an integral part of the original gardens of the priory and Monkton Old Hall. They lie to the north and west of the main terrace. At present there is no interconnection between the gardens of the Vicarage and Monkton Old Hall but a blocked doorway in the wall between them attests to their former integration.

The Vicarage garden is a four-sided walled compartment on level ground to the east of the Vicarage and west of the main terrace of Monkton Old Hall. The north wall is about 2.2 m high, with a short return next to the house. At the east end is a doorway through to the paddock, south of which is a short extension to the north wall of the Hall's main terrace. The east wall is about 2.3 m high and the south wall is similar, with a cross wall extending a short distance half way along. To its west is a blocked doorway which would have led through to the churchyard. The garden is laid out mainly to lawn.

The walled compartment to the north of the main terrace, now used as a paddock, was once part of the gardens. It is a rectangular area, larger than the terraced garden of Monkton Old Hall to the south, but with similar topography. At the top, on the west side, is a wide level terrace backed on the west side by a wall about 1.5 m high, rising to 3.5 m in the north-west corner. At the south end of the wall there are two doors. The northern one leads out into the field north of the Vicarage garden. The southern one, which has a horizontal, modern lintel, leads into the garden. On the east side the terrace is bounded by a stony grass scarp about 1 m high. The north wall of the compartment is about 3 m high, with an uneven top. The south wall (north wall of the terraced compartment to the south) is 2.5 - 3 m high, rising to about 3.5 m at its west end. Towards its upper end is a blocked doorway which would have led through to the Monkton Old Hall garden. Below the top terrace the ground slopes quite steeply and a number of ancient fruit trees grow on the slope. On the central, east-west axis is an overgrown and decayed path, about 2 m wide, punctuated by four flights of steps. The upper steps have concrete treads on brick risers and are flanked by square piers and low stone walls. The lower steps have stone treads and sunk below the slope.

At the foot of the slope is a level terrace about 4 m wide, backed on the west by a dry-stone retaining wall about 1.2 m high, rising to about 1.8 m high at the south end. Towards the north end of the terrace is a small, square sunk feature, which might

have been a pool or well. The east wall of the compartment is about 3.5 m high and has a pointed-arch door in it.

Next to the south wall, about half way down the slope and built into it, is a small, ruined, stone building. Its west wall is about 2.3 m high and more or less complete, the north and east walls stand up to about 1.5 m and the south wall is mostly gone. There is no roof. In the middle of the back (west) wall is a small, slate-lined niche.

The gardens of Monkton Old Hall and the Vicarage together have their origins in the medieval period. At this time they lay within the precinct of St Nicholas's Priory and Monkton Old Hall is thought to have been the guest-house. The inset map of Pembroke in John Speed's map of Pembrokeshire, dated 1610, shows the buildings and precinct wall of Monkton Priory. The precinct appears to include land to the north of the gardens, towards the estuary, and an area west of the church. No garden is shown within the precinct, although gardens and orchards are shown within the walled town. However, the scale of the map probably precluded any depiction of garden enclosures within the precinct. Fenton's description of 1811 is the earliest that mentions the walled precinct, which he noted as 'a paddock well walled round, commanding a fine view of the estuary, castle and town of Pembroke'. The dovecot lay just outside, to the north. The precinct was clearly more extensive than the walled garden enclosures but included them and it can be assumed that the Vicarage garden walls, the walled former orchard and at least the upper terrace of Monkton Old Hall date to the medieval period. The original internal layout of the enclosures is not known but is likely to have been simple. The small building in the former orchard may date to the medieval period but its function is not known.

The dating of the lower terraces of Monkton Old Hall is problematic. In terms of construction their walling is no different to that of the other compartments and terraces, and the steps of worn stone have an ancient appearance. However, the odd brick built into the walling of the lower terraces suggests that they are not medieval, nor probably even Tudor or seventeenth-century. Stylistically it is unusual to encounter terracing and steps of this kind in a medieval garden. They would be more in keeping with a Tudor or seventeenth-century garden, but during this period, as will be seen, the property was let and is unlikely to have been embellished.

In the three hundred or so years between the dissolution of the Priory in 1539 and the second half of the nineteenth century it is probable that little development took place in the walled enclosures. The Priory estate passed through several hands and for much of this time was owned by the Devereux family and leased out. In the first half of the nineteenth century it belonged to Sir John Owen of Orierton, who sold in 1857 to Sir Thomas Meyrick of Bush. None of these owners, all absentee, would have had an interest in developing the gardens. An oil painting of Pembroke Castle by Augustus W. Callcott (1779-1844) provides probable confirmation that the lower terraces were not in existence in the early nineteenth century. The painting is a view from the north and clearly shows the church and Monkton Old Hall. A wall is shown on the top of the slope north of the Hall; below it appears to be a steep, scrubby slope. An estate map of 1848 shows the upper terrace of Monkton Old Hall (subdivided as now) and the orchard enclosure (with the building shown), both coloured pink, and the enclosure that later became the Vicarage garden coloured green (as is the field to its north). The area of the lower terraces of Monkton Old Hall, together with the area to its south-east is a separate but single, uncoloured, enclosure, implying that it was not in the estate's ownership. A slightly later estate map, of 1859, shows the same

layout, with the area of the lower terraces being labelled as the property of Thomas Hurlow, Esq. and Mrs Llewellyn. This suggests that it was probably divided into two, the division not being shown as the area fell outside the estate's ownership and was therefore of no interest. The area of the lower terraces would therefore appear not to have been part of the Monkton Priory estate in the mid nineteenth century. Its layout can only be surmised, but the Callcott painting shows a row of small, undistinguished houses on the Monkton Pill, at the foot of the slope, and these are unlikely to have had sophisticated, terraced gardens attached to them.

However, if it is the case that the terraces were not in existence in 1859, then they were made between 1859 and the date of survey of the 1st edition 25 in. Ordnance Survey map published in 1885. No survey date is given but it was probably surveyed in 1864, as was the neighbouring sheet. This map shows the garden layout more or less as it is now. The gardens are still united: there is a path from the churchyard to the Old Hall garden, passing through a doorway near the south end of the east wall of the churchyard. The map clearly shows the lower terraces in their present form. There are two buildings at their foot, since gone. The upper terrace and first of the lower ones have perimeter paths around them. The two below have both perimeter and central paths. Interestingly, no steps are shown down to the second terrace, but the tree symbols may obscure them. The map shows trees planted on the terraces and trees lining the paths, which suggests that they were well established at the time. It would appear, therefore, that if the map was surveyed in about 1864 the garden on the lower terraces was made before J.R. Cobb obtained the lease of the property in 1879, during the ownership of Sir Thomas Meyrick of Bush. The period can be narrowed even further, to between 1859, when the lower terraces area was in separate ownership, and about 1864. In his article of 1880 in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* about his work at Monkton, Cobb makes no mention of the garden, perhaps suggesting that he did not have a hand in it.

After about 1864 other changes took place on the upper terrace and in the old orchard. At some stage the doorway into the churchyard and that from the upper terrace to the old orchard were blocked, making the garden of Monkton Old Hall separate from that of the Vicarage. This is likely to have taken place soon after the Vicarage was built in the late nineteenth century. At the same time the doorway through from the Vicarage garden to the old orchard enclosure was probably made. It may also have been at this time that the orchard enclosure was developed more as a garden, with the upper terrace, central path and steps and lower terrace. The 2nd edition 25 in. Ordnance Survey map of 1908 shows this layout, with the slope planted as an orchard. However, again caution is needed as there is a possibility that the terracing is more ancient and only the steps date to the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. The gothic arched doorway in the east wall, with its brick head, is likely to be of this latter date. A similar doorway in the wall dividing the upper terrace of Monkton Old Hall is probably contemporary.

The phase of ownership of Monkton Old Hall by Miss Muriel Thompson, from 1933 to 1978 saw little if any structural changes made to the garden but a great deal of planting. Miss Thompson was gardening correspondent for *Everywoman* magazine and a knowledgeable planter. Some of the mature trees on the terraces and mature shrubs throughout the garden probably date to this era.

Since 1978, when Monkton Old Hall was given to the Landmark Trust, there have been a few changes in the immediate vicinity of the house. The courtyard on its north side was made by raising the level about 1.3 m and paving the area with blue

Pennant flagstones. Steps around the house were built from Carmarthen 'black' limestone slabs recovered from the demolished Stackpole Court.

Sources

Primary

John Speed 1610 map of Pembrokeshire.

'Maps of the Bush Estate' 1848. Map 19, 'The Priory Estate'. Pembrokeshire Record Office, ref. D/BUSH/6/27.

'Map of the Priory estate in the parish of Monkton, the property of Thomas Meyrick Esq.', by John Lewis, 1859. Pembrokeshire Record Office, ref. D/BUSH/6/145.

Oil painting of Pembroke Castle, Augustus W. Callcott (1779-1844): private collection.

Information from the late Charlotte Haslam.

Secondary

Fenton, R., *An historical tour through Pembrokeshire* (1811), 206.

Cobb, J.R., 'Old Hall, Monkton, Pembroke', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* XI, 4th series (1880), 248-52

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