

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

SITE DOSSIER

SITE NAME Abergavenny Castle

REF. NO. PGW (Gt) 9

OS MAP 161 GRID REF. SO 299140

FORMER COUNTY Gwent UNITARY AUTHORITY Monmouth B.C. COMMUNITY COUNCIL
Abergavenny

DESIGNATIONS Listed building: Abergavenny Castle (grade I)
National Park AONB SSSI NNR ESA GAM SAM (Mn 56) CA

SITE EVALUATION Grade II

Primary reasons for grading

Castle ruins landscaped with picturesque walk and gardens in 19th
century

TYPE OF SITE

Picturesque walk and landscaping in medieval castle ruins

MAIN PHASES OF CONSTRUCTION

c. 1800; late 19th century

VISITED BY/DATE Elisabeth Whittle/September 1990

HOUSE

Name Abergavenny Castle

Grid ref SO 299140

Date/style Medieval/1819

Brief description

The medieval castle is in ruins and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Mn 56). Parts of the curtain wall, gatehouse and W towers survive. Within the castle precinct stands the motte of the first castle on the site, on which the small Victorian house was built in 1819. This is now the Abergavenny Museum.

OUTBUILDINGS

Name

Grid ref

Date/style, and brief description

THE PLEASURE GARDEN

Grid ref SO 299140

Date/style c. 1800; last quarter of 19th century/picturesque walk;
picturesque and formal public garden

GENERAL DESCRIPTION AND LAYOUT

The earliest landscaping at the castle was done at the very beginning of the 19th century, with the provision of picturesque walks within the curtain walls, with views overlooking the Usk valley. Possibly the winding walk up the motte and definitely the walk around the S end of the castle date from this period, between 1799 (Coxe's plan) and 1805, when seen by Mavor. Both walks remain, at the south end of the castle grounds.

The precinct of the castle and an area outside the NW curtain wall were laid out in the last quarter of the 19th century by William Nevill, 5th earl and 19th lord of Abergavenny (marquess after 1876) as a 'place of recreation' for the general public. Late 19th-early 20th-century photographs of the gardens show an elaborate layout of winding paths and beds outside the NW curtain wall, between it and the lodge at the entrance. The curtain wall and towers of the castle were embellished with much rustic fencework and gazebos: a walk lined with rustic fencing ran along the top of the curtain wall and there were lookouts and gazebos in the towers and on the walls. This has all completely disappeared, but the structural elements of the gardens - the levelled lawn and raised rockery - remain, as does a little tree planting.

STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

The garden lay chiefly within the precinct of the medieval castle. In the southern half, around the motte, a level area was revetted with a massive stone wall (post 1799). A walk was made around the edge (seen by Mavor in 1805, who commented 'a terrace walk, conducted round the site it occupied ... shews much taste'), with views out southwards over the Usk flood plain. Now the area is grassed, with a gravel path from the NW tower northwards along the retaining wall to the lodge at the entrance to the castle.

The winding walk up the motte runs from E to W around the S side of the motte, rising to about two-thirds of the way up it. On the SE side there is a stone seat back cut into the motte beside the path.

To the N of the Victorian block is a level lawn which used to be tennis courts. This is backed, to the N, by a curving grass bank c. 1.8 m. high with a narrow terrace half-way up it. Above this is the rockery incorporating the medieval castle wall, and to the N of that is a roughly rectangular level grass area enclosed by walls of medieval origin.

BUILT COMPONENTS

To the N of the tennis court lawn the ruined castle wall has been incorporated into a garden rockery. The wall is c. 1.6 m. high (above the grass terrace to the S), with steps up to it in the middle. On its N side a rockery slope has been built up, with a path (gravel, stone-edged) along the top and bottom. Large stones are visible on the surface of the rockery slope.

ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENTS

There is a stone seat back on the SE side of the motte path.
The rockery paths are stone-edged

PLANTED COMPONENTS

Most of the garden is now laid out to lawns, including the area outside the curtain wall to the NW which was laid out in the late 19th century with elaborately winding paths and sinuous flower beds.

There is a large copper beech within the W tower, which probably dates from the early 19th century. To the W of the tennis court lawn are three trees close together - a holly, a yew and a cypress. There is a further cypress in the N corner of the lawn to the N of the rockery.

Between the medieval gatehouse and the lodge, on the NE side of the path are three pollarded horse chestnuts.

Reconstructions of original planted features
None

Special collections of garden plants
None

Documented living plants
None

Other (including elements of nature conservation interest)
None

ESSENTIAL SETTING AND VIEWS BEYOND THE SITE

The view from the terrace to the S of the motte to the river Usk and its flood plain (A on map) is more or less unspoilt and would have been part of the original reason for laying out the walks and gardens.

ANY SPECIAL FEATURES

None

SURVIVAL OF INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS

Structural components: most

Built components: little

Architectural ornaments: none

Planted components: very little

SOURCES

Primary

Series of photographs in Abergavenny Castle Museum collection, c. 1900
Set of 7 miniature views (photographs), c. 1900: National Library of
Wales (Scrap Album PB 4626)

Secondary

W. Coxe, *An Historical Tour in Monmouthshire* (1801)
W.F. Mavor, *A Tour in Wales and through several counties of England*
... performed in the summer of 1805, (1806).
J. Bradney, *A History of Monmouthshire* Pt. II, (1906), p. 148.

To be appended: 1:10,000 map of site, marked with boundaries,
viewpoints etc.; colour photographs of site, photocopies of relevant
material, where available.