

## CALDEY PRIORY

<b>Ref number</b>	<b>PGW (Dy) 60 (PEM)</b>
<b>OS Map</b>	158
<b>Grid ref</b>	SS 141 963
<b>Former county</b>	Dyfed
<b>Unitary authority</b>	Pembrokeshire
<b>Community council</b>	Caldey Island
<b>Designations</b>	Listed Building: Caldey Priory (Grade I)
<b>Site evaluation</b>	<b>Grade II</b>

**Primary reasons for grading**      The survival of part of the structure, including a pond, of a medieval priory garden, overlain by a nineteenth-century compartmented garden associated with a demolished mansion on the priory site.

**Type of site**                      Ponds and walled gardens

**Main phases of construction**      Twelfth century; 1800; 1867; 1910-13

### Site description

The ruins of Caldey Priory lie in the southern half of the small island of Caldey, which is situated close to the Pembrokeshire coast, south of Tenby. The island is irregular in outline, elongated east-west, tapering to a small rocky outlier, St Margaret's Island, at the west end. The widest part of the island is in the east, where settlement, past and present, is concentrated. Above the cliffs and sandy bays of the coast the island consists of a low plateau sloping gently up towards the south, reaching its maximum height of 56m at West Beacon Point and Chapel Point, where there is a lighthouse. Most of the island is grazed, divided into large rectangular fields bounded by stone walls. There is an area of woodland in the north-east corner of the island.

Settlement on the island now consists mainly of the Caldey Island Cistercian monastery, which occupies an enclosure on the east side of the island, a farm, a few houses and tourist facilities, which are mainly concentrated to the south of the landing jetty in Priory Bay.

The priory ruins lie in a sheltered, north-facing position, on a spring line, 20m above sea level. They consist of a complex of rubble stone buildings, most restored and re-roofed, clustered around a small cobbled courtyard. On the south side of the courtyard is the restored priory church, St Illtud's. At its west end is a small tower topped by a narrow, faceted, stone spire. The two-storey gatehouse lies on the west side of the courtyard. This restored building has a wide entrance arch at its southern end and external stairs to the upper floor at its north end. The upper inner wall is pierced with nesting holes for pigeons. On the east side of the courtyard is a further

range which terminates at the north end in a sturdy, square, castellated tower with arrowslits rather than windows, suggesting serious fortification. To the east is a rectangular walled enclosure which was probably a garden. To the west is a farmyard enclosed by barns.

The early nineteenth-century mansion lay on the north side of the priory complex, its kitchen wing inserted in its north range. The outline of the building can be made out from earthworks and the footings of parts of its walls. In front, facing the garden on its north side, was a verandah, which can also be made out.

There has been a religious establishment on the island since the sixth century, at which time it was given the name Ynys Pyr, the Island of Pyro, the first abbot. In 1136 the island was given to the Benedictine abbey of Tiron, in France, which had already founded its abbey of St Dogmaels, near Cardigan. Most of the present priory buildings have their origins in this phase. At the Dissolution in 1536 it is thought that only one monk was left. The priory buildings were bought by John Bradshaw of Presteigne and converted for private use. Much of the present fabric dates to after the Dissolution. The church was used as a malt house and later as a forge, barn and laundry. In 1601 the Priory was bought by Walter Philpin, Mayor of Tenby and in 1653 was sold to Reeve Williams of Llanrhidian and Robert Williams of Loughor. In 1603 George Owen (*The description of Pembrokeshire*) indicated that the priory buildings were ruined but two drawings by Sir Richard Colt Hoare, dating to about 1800, show buildings in good condition. It is thought that the priory was rebuilt in the late sixteenth to early seventeenth century; the east range became a grand house and the church a farmhouse at the core of an agricultural complex which included the west range.

The island was bought in 1798 by Thomas Kynaston of Pembroke in order to exploit its resources of limestone. Kynaston built a substantial, two-storey, classical mansion on the north side of the priory in 1800, converting the other buildings for farm use. He also built further farm buildings, many of which remain. In 1867 James Hawkesley (died 1891) bought the island and developed a thriving market gardening industry based on steam-heated glasshouses, now gone. Thomas Smith Cunningham bought the property in 1894 and returned the church to its original use. In 1897 the Reverend Done Bushell, a teacher at Harrow, bought the island and renovated the priory buildings and the two churches on the island, St Illtud's, the priory church, and St David's, a medieval church to the north.

In 1906 the island was sold again to an Anglican Benedictine brotherhood, under Dom. Aelred Carlyle. Carlyle embarked on an ambitious programme of building which, in its scaled down form, gave the island most of its present layout. The monastery was built in 1910-13 using stone from the island's High Cliff quarry. In 1921 Carlyle resigned as abbot and in 1928 the monks moved to Prinknash, Gloucestershire. Meanwhile, in 1925, the island had been sold again, this time to the Reformed Cistercians, who own the island and occupy the monastery today.

In 1954 Thomas Kynaston's house, which had been standing empty for many years, was damaged by a storm and in the 1970s it was finally demolished as being unsafe.

To the west of the priory buildings is a nineteenth-century farmyard with single-storey stone buildings ranged around three sides of a square court, the priory occupying the east side. Further small outbuildings were added at the north end of the walled garden in the nineteenth century.

The gardens associated with the priory and the mansion house lie to the north and east of the priory complex. They occupy the level ground in the immediate vicinity of the buildings and the small, narrow valley running northwards from them. This part of the former gardens tapers to a point about 200 m north of the priory. There are two distinct phases of development; first, the medieval garden, ponds and mill associated with the priory; secondly the nineteenth-century garden that was partly overlain on them.

The medieval remains consist of a small walled garden attached to the priory buildings, a series of ponds and the ruins of a mill. The walled garden lies immediately to the east of the east range of the priory. It consists of a rectangular area enclosed by rubble stone walls about 2.5 m high on the north, south and east sides. There is a brick-arched entrance opening in the middle of the south side, whose similarity to the arched openings in the nineteenth-century garden make it seem probable that this was inserted at that time. The east wall continues southwards beyond the garden, forming the west enclosing wall of the adjacent pond. It appears to have been altered and partly rebuilt at some stage, or stages, as it has blocked 'windows' and contains some brick.

There are three ponds, which are probably of medieval origin, in the valley to the east and north of the priory. The uppermost is the largest and although silted it still holds water. It is rectangular and lies to the east of the priory and walled garden. It retains its stone edging and occupies a slight hollow, with an overflow at the north-east corner. At its west end is a twentieth-century concrete dam separating the western end from the rest of the pond. The second pond lies to the north, lower down the valley. It is now heavily overgrown and remains as a boggy area. It is smaller and D-shaped, with the straight side being formed by the dam along its north side. To the north is the last pond, which is much smaller than the others and has been given a concrete dam in the twentieth century. All three ponds are shown on the 1887 Ordnance Survey map.

The garden made by Thomas Kynaston to accompany the mansion that he built in 1800 occupies the level ground to the north of the mansion site and the valley in which the ponds are situated. To the north is a rectangular area, now much overgrown and with large banks of *Rhododendron ponticum* and shrub roses on its fringes. It is bounded on the north by an inwardly-curving ha-ha and on the west by a stone wall. In the centre, opposite the mansion site, is a fallen sundial. This is built of stone, with a square base and square-sectioned pedestal. The 1887 Ordnance Survey map shows this area laid out with a central, splayed lawn in front of the house, the sundial in the middle of a circular walk, and the flanking areas planted with trees and shrubs as shrubberies and laid out with peripheral walks. These areas appear to have been walled, but the only remaining walls are on the west side of the garden and along the north boundary of the east shrubbery. The east side of the shrubbery is now bounded by a low bank. The detail of this layout is no longer visible but may be recoverable.

In the north-west corner of the east shrubbery area are the incomplete walls of a small circular folly, which is shown on the 1887 map. The rubble stone walls stand up to 2.5 m high. On the east side are two small square windows with stone surrounds and flanked by upright ceramic pipes. Around them are shells set in concrete. Above are three large stones, two of waterworn limestone, one of quartz, and lumps of quartz. The entrance on the south side is flanked by an upright pipe on the west; that on the east side has gone. The interior is lined with shells set in concrete. Behind the

building is the ruinous garden boundary wall and a short stretch of return wall on its west side.

To the east of this garden area the valley was laid out as a garden with five stone-walled compartments. These are bounded on the east by a hedgebank and a lane leading to the priory. The large pond east of the priory was also surrounded on all but the north side by a low stone wall, possibly at the same time as the other compartments were made. To the south of this pond is the uppermost garden compartment, a four-sided area at a slightly lower level. This is bounded on the north by a rubble stone wall about 2.2 m high, with a brick-arched entrance towards the east end, where a path leads through to the next compartment. On the west side is a bank about 0.7 m high on the site of a wall and on the south and east by a bank which drops about 3 m down to the garden level. A path, with a flight of three stone steps near the east end of the south side, crosses the interior and leads to a fountain pool in the centre. This is a sunken, concrete-lined, circular pool, no longer holding water. In its centre is a slender, squared, stone pillar about 1.8 m high. The pool has a waterworn rockwork surround. The 1887 map shows the compartment laid out with the central fountain, perimeter and diagonal paths and a few trees, but of this layout only a single path and the fountain pool remain.

The next compartment to the north is largely taken up by the second pond. It has an extension southwards in the south-east corner and this contains some old water tanks against the east boundary of the upper compartment. There is another large water tank outside the west wall, at its south end. The compartment is bounded by a bank on the east side and by a rubble stone wall up to 1 m high on the west side, with a blocked entrance at its south end. Beyond this wall is an overgrown area of mixed trees, including poplars. Along the north side is the earthen dam of the pond, which has a flat top and stone parapet about 0.2 m high. In the middle is a sluice and stone-lined water channel leading to the mill below. There is a low wall on the north side of the dam, at the east end of which is an entrance to the compartment from the lane, flanked by square stone piers about 1.7 m high, with overhanging tops on which are large lumps of waterworn limestone in the shape of animal heads. A wall about 1.5 m high runs northwards from the west pier, with a gap in it leading to the next compartment to the north.

The third compartment is rectangular and is overgrown with sycamores. It is bounded on the north, east and west by rubble stone walls 1-1.2 m high. There is an entrance gap in the middle of the north wall. The mill ruins lie in the centre of its south side, against the pond dam wall, which is about 3 m high. The mill is a simple, roofless, rectangular building. The wheel was on its west side and below its site is a stone-lined tailrace channel. Below is a smaller, rectangular compartment, with similar boundary walls. It also is overgrown with sycamores. Along its west side is a rectangular, concrete-lined pond, with concrete steps down its dam bank at the north end. The north wall by the pond is about 1.5 m high and has a path running east-west along its top. Outside the west wall is a second concrete-lined pond, higher and smaller than the first. Both ponds were originally built for use as cress beds.

The last, fifth, compartment is an elongated triangle in shape. It too is walled and heavily overgrown. It contains a small pond, with a concrete dam, in its south-west corner, linked to the east cress bed by a sluice. Just to the north-west of the pond, outside the garden wall, are the roofless remains of a small rectangular cottage. To the north of the pond the mill tailrace continues as a ditch down the west side of the wooded compartment. This continues northwards beyond the garden. A path ran

north-south through this area, crossing the channel on a bridge at the north end. The stone bridge, which remains, is substantial, with a small arch at its base. The path leads to a gate in the east wall of the compartment, where it emerges on to the lane.

There is some evidence as to the appearance of the garden in the nineteenth century. The earliest is a watercolour dated 11 September 1847, by Mrs Fanny Price Gwynne, a resident of Tenby and author of many guidebooks to Tenby and the area at that period. This is a view of the garden and mansion from a point on the lane at the north-east corner of the D-shaped pond. It shows the pond full of water, with a small island near the south end and backed by the well wooded garden. The mansion appears above the trees and a flag flies from a tall flagpole on what was probably the lawn, although this is not visible. A pencilled note in the margin states 'pond is now smaller' but when this was written is not known (Mrs Gwynne died in about 1900). The 1887 map shows the compartments laid out with paths and planted with mixed deciduous and coniferous trees. It would appear that those between the house and the mill were more ornamented than those to the north, in which there was informal tree planting and a walk. The cress beds were a later, twentieth-century addition.

## **Sources**

### **Primary**

National Library of Wales, topographical prints, Pembrokeshire: A, PA2360, Top B12.

Two drawings of Caldey Priory, c. 1800, by Sir Richard Colt Hoare: National Library of Wales, Charles Norris Collection, PA4751 a, b.

Watercolour by Mrs Fanny Price Gwynne, 11 September 1847. Private collection.

N. Ludlow, 'A structural analysis of Caldey Priory, Dyfed' (1994). Cambria Archaeology.

### **Secondary**

G. Owen, *The description of Pembrokeshire* (1603, reprinted 1994), pp. 112-13.

A. Shepherd, *A visitor's guide to Caldey Island* (nd).