

SUMMARY

Ref number	PGW (Gt) 61 (MON)
OS Map	1621171
Grid ref	ST 490 980
Former county	Gwent
Local authority	Monmouthshire
Community Council	Devauden
Designation	Scheduled ancient monuments: Chepstow Park Wood moated site (Mm1 02); Chepstow Park Wood cairn (Mm286).
Site Evaluation	Grade II
Primary reasons for grading	<i>Chepstow Park Wood is an unusually well-preserved and well-delineated deer park that belonged to Chepstow Castle. It has two distinct phases of development: in the medieval and Jacobean periods. In the medieval period it was a simple deer park bounded by a wooden fence. In the 1630s it was walled and probably used for deer coursing; the one-mile track probably ran from the entrance at Pen-y-Parc to the now ruined lodge. If this is the case, this is the only known deer course in Wales and one of only a handful in Britain.</i>
Type of site	<i>Medieval deer park; seventeenth-century deer park and deer course, with lodge.</i>
Main phases of construction	<i>About 1270s; about 1630.</i>

Site description

Chepstow Park Wood deer park is a well-delineated, roughly triangular area of woodland, about 8,150 acres in size, situated about 6.5km to the north-west of Chepstow Castle. The area occupied lies on the highest part of the ridge to the west of the Wye valley (the highest point within the park being 284m, towards its north-west corner) and is about 2.5km east-west and north-south. The village of Devauden lies just outside its north-west corner. The park is bounded on the north side by the Devauden to Chepstow road and on the west side by the Devauden to Itton road. The south-west to north-east boundary is delineated by the park wall, outside which are fields. The park boundary is 7.8km long. The highest part of the park is at the north end; from here the ground drops steeply to the boundary on the north side and more gently on the other sides.

The park is largely taken up with commercially managed coniferous plantations, but amongst these there are pockets of indigenous deciduous woodland of mainly oak, beech and ash. A network of tracks runs through the park from several entrances. Some of these are associated with the forestry operations, but some appear older, following more winding courses. In particular, several tracks and paths can be traced from presumed original entrance points. One of these, leading southwards from the Devauden entrance, has the typical character of a medieval track, being sunken between two banks.

The park is bounded by a more or less continuous drystone rubble wall built of blocks of local conglomerate stone of varying size. Some stretches are very well preserved and others are more broken down, but the boundary can be traced in its entirety. There are six possible principal medieval entrance points and several further minor ones that may be medieval in origin.

Starting in the north-west corner, there is a definite original entrance just to the south of Devauden. A track flanked by substantial banks runs southwards from the edge of the village to the entrance to the wood. There are no entrance remains, but the boundary wall marks the boundary on either side; the wall is about 1.5m high on the outside and 0.5–0.7m high on the inside. To the north-east the wall runs down the slope, at a variable height, to the edge of the wood on the Chepstow road. Here it becomes a revetment wall for a short distance before continuing eastwards, parallel to and above the road, at an uneven height.

The next entrance, towards the east end of the north side, is now a vehicular entrance for forestry traffic, and therefore quite wide. Any original entrance has been obscured, but it is possible that this is a second medieval entry point as, to the north, a track runs from here into a wood named 'New Wood'. To the east of the entrance the wall continues, running south-eastwards along the Chepstow road for a short distance and then diverging from it, leaving a narrow field between the road and the wood. The wall here is about 1.3m high and well preserved. The southern half of the east side has a boundary wall about 1–1.2m high, with a substantial internal ditch next to it; this is about 2m wide and 1.2–1.6m deep, and dry.

The next probable entrance is at the south end of the east side, at the farmhouse of Pen-y-Parc. The boundary here turns sharply to the west and there is likely to have been an entrance at this eastern extremity, which is the closest part of the park to Chepstow Castle. This was probably the entrance mentioned in the castle accounts for 1288/89 and may have been the only entrance at that time. The name of the farm also indicates a link to the deer park.

The boundary wall along the south-east side of the park is continuous and for the most part well preserved; at the east end it is up to 1.3m high. A track from Pen-y-Parc enters the park about 0.5km south-west of the farmhouse and beyond this point is the best preserved stretch of boundary wall, running south-eastwards to the southern tip of the park. This is about 1.8–2m high on the outside, with what appears to be an original pedestrian gap near its east end; towards the southern end the wall drops to about 1.5m externally and up to 0.7m internally.

There is a modern forestry entrance near the south end, at Itton Common, which probably masks an original entrance. A track runs northwards from it into the wood. To the south-west of the entrance the boundary wall runs along a narrow lane, acting partly as a revetment wall, and then continues westwards along the north side of private gardens in Itton Common.

The boundary wall runs northwards from Itton Common, within the wood, parallel to the Devauden to Itton road. Near Devauden it diverges from the road, leaving a gap between the wall and road of gradually widening fields. At the north end of the first, narrow field is the last possible medieval entrance to the park. A track from the road runs on a raised causeway — the south end revetted with a stone wall on its west side — to an entrance gap in the wall, with a track running from it into the park. The walls here are about 1.5m high and broken down in places.

Within the park are a number of built structures. The most important is the deer park lodge, situated in the centre, on the high ground towards the north end of the park at ST 490 979. This is a scheduled ancient monument (MM 103, Chepstow Park Wood moated site). The site consists of a circular earthwork, about 50m in diameter, within which are a ruined building and vaulted spring. The earthwork consists of a substantial outer bank, planted with Scots pines, about 0.8m high on the outside and 2–2.5m high on the inside of the west side. The bank is about 1.5m high on the east side, where

there are remains of drystone revetment on its inner side. A modern track leading south-eastwards cuts into the bank at the south end. Inside the outer bank is a flat-bottomed ditch, which is boggy on the south side, about 3m wide. On the inner side of the ditch there is a low bank, about 0.3m high, on the west and north sides.

In the centre are the remains of two buildings superimposed on each other. The underlying building has three small, rectangular compartments, orientated north-east/south-west. Remains consist of ruined walls of roughly squared stone standing to a height of up to 2m. Over the central compartment a smaller building or room has been constructed in similar materials. This is the best preserved section. Its walls stand to about 2m high, with an entrance on the north-east side and a small alcove in the south-west wall.

In the south-west section of the ditch is a vaulted spring. The water rises into a small, vaulted alcove of squared stonework, covered with flagstones. In front is a small, rectangular pool.

There are two spring-fed ponds, at present very overgrown, on the higher ground in the middle of the park. A short distance to their south-west is a small reservoir (ST 494 978). This is four-sided, with a substantial dam on its south, east and west sides. It is fed by a stream from the north. A bypass ditch runs north-south along the east side. The outlet channel is on the south side, leading to a culvert under the track immediately to the south and then to a watercourse that runs southwards through the park.

The final built structure of historical significance is a substantial raised platform situated close to the park boundary to the south-west of Pen-y-Parc (ST 501 974). It is roughly rectangular and faces eastwards, out from the park. The east side is about 4.5m wide and 1.4m high and is faced with a rubble-stone wall with splayed ends. The wall has been mortared with a concrete mortar, but it is unclear when this was done.

Roger Bigod, fifth earl of Norfolk (1245–1306), became the owner of the great estate of the Marshal family in 1270, inherited through Maud, the eldest daughter of William Marshal. One of the most prestigious of the many properties he gained was Chepstow Castle and there is evidence, through the amount of building work he undertook there, that this was one of his favourite castles. Here he could indulge his pastimes in the relative freedom of his marcher fiefdom.

During this period Chepstow Castle had under its jurisdiction one forest (Wentwood), one chase (Tidenham, on the English side of the river Wye) and two parks (Tidenham Park and New, or Chepstow Park). All but Chepstow Park were pre-existing and it is clear from the name and the records that Bigod established a new deer park on the ridge above Chepstow. This became known as Chepstow Park but was initially called the 'New Park'. The first references to it are in accounts of 1283, which refer to the 'Wages of 2 parkers of the New Park 2d/day, 3rd parker 1 1/2 d/day'. It is therefore likely that the park was established shortly beforehand, probably in the 1270s. From the records, which continue until 1303/04, it is clear that the park was bounded by a tall fence of wooden palings that required frequent repair. During some of Roger Bigod's time there was a forester called John de Newent (a town in the Forest of Dean), who oversaw work and commoners' rights in the forest, chase and parks of Chepstow Castle. There are references to an entrance gate, which was fitted in 1288/89 and given a new lock in 1299/1300. This was undoubtedly at Pen-y-Parc on the east side of the park and the nearest point on the boundary to the castle. In 1299/1300 a flimsy hut was built, using twigs and daubing, but it is unclear where this was.

It is clear from the records that some, at least, of the park was wooded at the time: wood was sold from it and there was a keeper of

the charcoal pit. Sporting use was probably mainly hunting deer and hunting with falcons, which are mentioned. Some parts were also used for grazing, as is made clear in Roger Bigod's *Inquisition post mortem* of 1306, which lists deer and sixty oxen from Tintern Abbey within the park.

No mention is made in the medieval accounts of a park lodge and there is a strong case for the ruined lodge, and its surrounding earthwork, in the centre of the park to be seventeenth-century in date.

On Roger Bigod's death the park, together with his entire estate, passed to the Crown. It appears to have been well maintained but it suffered serious vandalism in 1340, when a group of outlaws destroyed the fence, killed the deer and a parker and generally laid the park waste. It is not clear if it recovered.

The second major phase of development came in the 1630s. During this period the fifth earl of Worcester, of Raglan Castle, who owned the land at that time, enclosed the park with a drystone wall. This followed the medieval boundary and is the wall that exists today. A keeper of the park was included in a list of the earl's officers, implying the management of deer.

The reason for the park's re-enclosure and stocking (or restocking) with deer by the earl of Worcester was probably in order to set up a deer course. Deer coursing was popular from the Tudor period to about 1700. Instructions are given in manuals such as George Turbeville's *Booke of Hunting* (1611) and R. Blome's *The Gentleman's Recreation* (1686). Most courses were temporary affairs and the course was therefore enclosed with fencing within a deer park. The course was always a mile long, narrowing towards the end and finishing at a grandstand, where the two racing dogs that were chasing the deer would finish at a ditch. The deer would jump the ditch, but the dogs would be caught in it.

There were a few permanent deer courses: the best preserved is at Lodge Park, Sherborne, Gloucestershire. This has all the necessary ingredients: a deer park, a walled, mile-long course and a magnificent, beautiful grandstand — the Lodge. The course and Lodge were built in about 1630 by John 'Crump' Dutton, owner of the Sherborne estate. A few other permanent courses are known of but no longer exist, for instance at Hampton Court, where Henry VIII built one in 1537 (it was gone by the 1690s). A deer course is shown on Morden's 1607 map of Windsor Little Park, complete with a dog chasing deer. Interestingly, there was one at Badminton House, in Gloucestershire, into the eighteenth century. The fifth earl of Worcester removed from Raglan Castle to Badminton after the Civil War and the presence of a course there might indicate his continuing interest in the sport.

Evidence for a deer course at Chepstow Park is circumstantial, but quite compelling. The earl must have had a reason for wanting yet another deer park near his home of Raglan Castle. In the 1630s he already had three deer parks: two adjacent to the castle and one further away, at Llantilio Crossenny, to the north. It would appear that supply of venison was not a motive. As can be seen from the exactly contemporary Lodge Park course, the sport was popular at the time. The earl was one of the wealthiest landowners in the country and had ample opportunity to pursue whatever leisure activities took his fancy.

Evidence on the ground for a deer course is two-fold: the lodge and its position. The dating of this building and earthwork has been problematic. There have been questions as to whether the earthwork preceded the building within it and whether it might even be a prehistoric, Neolithic henge monument, with which it has some similarities. However, if the lodge was a deer-coursing grandstand the earthwork and buildings would both have served necessary functions

in relation to the coursing. They would therefore have gone together and been contemporary.

The first evidence for the lodge is on the 1764 Badminton estate map. This shows the park, with its present boundary wall, and the lodge, which is labelled 'The ruins of an old lodge'. It is not mentioned in the medieval accounts, which are detailed, and it is probable, therefore, that no lodge existed at this time. By 1764 it was ruined and 'old'. A date of about 1630 would be consistent with this evidence. If the lodge is of this date its use would have been short-lived; the earl of Worcester left Wales after the surrender of Raglan Castle to the Parliamentarians in 1646. At this juncture coursing in the park probably came to a halt.

The form of the earthwork and buildings is consistent with a function as a deer-course grandstand. The course would have funnelled deer and dogs towards the lodge, where the deer would have leapt the bank and ditch and made off and the dogs would have been caught. They would have been given a much-needed drink from the water in the covered spring, as the ditch would not have had water in it. The buildings are too ruinous for their appearance to be worked out. Their small size might indicate that they were little more than raised platforms from which to view the sport and judge the winner.

The second piece of evidence that supports the presence of a deer course in Chepstow Park is the exact position of the lodge within the park. If the deer course theory is correct, this is very precisely worked out. The lodge is exactly one mile from the Pen-y-Parc entrance to the park. The ground between the entrance and lodge would have been ideal for deer coursing. The first part of the course slopes gently upwards to the level ground of the second half of the course. Those at the lodge would have had a clear view of the deer and dogs approaching from the east.

The significance of a deer course at Chepstow Park would be very great. As mentioned above, very few courses are known and physical remains are very scarce. No other courses are known in Wales, although it is possible that there was one at Margam, Glamorgan, at some time during the Tudor or Stuart period.

The later history of the park is one of abandonment as a deer park. In the nineteenth century some tree planting took place, including the planting of Scots pines on and around the lodge, as a 'skyline' clump. The 1886 First Edition 25in Ordnance Survey map shows the park well wooded. It also shows a feature that must have been added between 1764 and 1886, but probably in the mid- to late nineteenth century — the reservoir. It is shown in its present form and labelled 'Reservoir (Chepstow Water Works)'. How, and by whom, the water was used is unclear. The park now belongs to the Forestry Commission and is largely managed for commercial forestry.

Sources

Primary

Receiver and reeve accounts for Chepstow Castle, 1283–1303/04: National Archives, Public Record Office, Kew, SC6 various.

Roger Bigod *Inquisition post mortem* 1306: National Archives, Public Record Office, Kew, C/133/127.

'Plan of Chepstow Park', 1764: National Library of Wales, Badminton Estate maps, album 1.

Secondary

K. Fretwell, 'Lodge Park, Gloucestershire: a rare surviving deer course and Bridgeman layout', *Garden History* 23.2 (1995), 133–44.

The National Trust, *Lodge Park* (guidebook, 2002).

R. Turner and A. Johnson (eds), *Chepstow Castle: Its History and Buildings* (2006).