

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

SITE DOSSIER

SITE NAME Lower Dyffryn

REF. NO. PGW (Gt) 24

OS MAP 161 GRID REF. SO 435228

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

DESIGNATIONS Listed building: Lower Dyffryn Grade II

National Park AONB SSSI NNR ESA GAM SAM CA

SITE EVALUATION Grade II

Primary reasons for grading

Preservation of Tudor terraced garden, with wall and alcove, in unaltered state.

TYPE OF SITE

16th-century formal walled and terraced garden above medieval or 16th-century fishponds

MAIN PHASES OF CONSTRUCTION

16th century

VISITED BY/DATE Elisabeth Whittle/December 1990

HOUSE

Name Lower Dyffryn

Grid ref SO 436227

Date/style Late 16th century-early 17th century/early Renaissance
stone house

Brief description

Lower Dyffryn is a substantial stone two-storey early Renaissance house dating from c. 1590-1630. It is built on an E-plan, with a central two-storey porch on the E side. The house is early Renaissance in style, built in the late 16th century. It was the home of a branch of the Cecil family.

OUTBUILDINGS

Name Farm buildings (barns etc.)

Grid ref SO 436227

Date/style, and brief description

Substantial stone barns and outbuildings to the SE and S of the house, possibly contemporary with it.

THE PLEASURE GARDEN

Grid ref SO 435227

Date/style Late 16th-century/formal terraced

GENERAL DESCRIPTION, HISTORY AND LAYOUT

The garden lies to the W of the house, and consists of a large terraced area bounded by a low wall on the W and S and a higher wall on the N. The lower part of this wall is the terrace revetment wall, and below it are the remains of medieval or Tudor fishponds. The N wall stands more or less to its full height, and in the middle is a rounded alcove with a small window in the middle of it looking out over the fishponds down to the river Monnow below. At the W end is a doorway into a small lean-to building, now roofless and disused.

The layout and style of the terrace and its walling suggests that it is contemporary with the house, and dates from the late 16th century. The alcove with its window looking out over the fishponds and valley appears to be both inward-looking (the now vanished seat around it) and outward-looking (the window), and is evidence of the desire to admire the view from a garden at this date. The fishponds below may be earlier or may be contemporary also. (A drain carries water underneath the garden to the ponds, so they are unlikely to be later than the garden.)

STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

Terrace

A large, roughly square terrace to the W of the house. The area is levelled, with a slight scarp running E-W down the middle. On the S side the terrace is slightly cut into the slope, on the W slightly built up, and on the N there is a steep drop down to the fishponds which is revetted with a stone wall.

Fishponds

These lie to the N of the garden terrace, below the N wall of the terrace. They are now pasture, with later straight ditches cut across them. Along the NE edge of the field is a substantial straight bank, now breached in several places, but originally the lower dam of the ponds. To the W is a rectangular levelled area, the western end of the pond or ponds.

BUILT COMPONENTS

The terrace has walls on the W and N side. The E side is bounded by the house. The W wall is a drystone wall c. 1 m. high (this may not be its original height).

On the S side, at the S end of the house, the garden is bounded by a well preserved wall c. 2.2 m. high on the N and W sides of a small cobbled court from which there are two doors into the garden, on its N and W sides.

The N wall of the garden is mostly stone, c. 2.2 m. high, with a higher section near the W end with curving ends. The wall stands to its full height and is capped by flat stones. Near the N end is a doorway into a roofless lean-to building of two small rooms. This may be later than the N wall, and appears to have had a utilitarian purpose. In the centre is a semi-circular alcove c. 2.5 m. in diameter with a small rectangular window in the centre, still with its wooden surround and mullion (the lintel is broken). Ivy grows over the top. About 0.7 m. from the bottom of the alcove wall it projects out slightly, suggesting that there was originally a seat (wooden?) around it. The corners are substantial, and are built of dressed stones,

larger than those of the rest of the wall. The section of wall to the E of the alcove has two large cracks and a door in it, and the part to the E of the door has been rebuilt in brick. The next section to the E is recessed slightly to the N. On the outside of this part are two relieving arches and a stone-lined drain exit (water taken underneath the garden to the fishponds).

Stone steps (3) lead down into the garden from a doorway (now French windows) on the W side of the house.

ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENTS

None

PLANTED COMPONENTS

Terrace: rough grass, with one yew bush near the E end.

Fishponds: pasture

Reconstructions of original planted features

None

Special collections of garden plants

None

Documented living plants

None

Other (including elements of nature conservation interest)

Around the garden, especially to the W, is very well preserved ridge and furrow (parallel banks left by medieval open-field cultivation: see HLW (Gt) 9: Lower Dyffryn Farm)

ESSENTIAL SETTING AND VIEWS BEYOND THE SITE

Essential setting: pasture to W, S and N

View: from the alcove window N across fishponds and valley to the river Monnow and far side of valley (A on map)

ANY SPECIAL FEATURES (e.g. continuation of avenues, belts, clumps, eyecatchers, e.g. church spire)

None

SURVIVAL OF INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS

Structural components: All

Built components: Most

Architectural ornaments: None

Planted components: Very little

SOURCES

(Primary and secondary. For primary, give location. Aerial photos
(AP): ref. no and collection)

Secondary

Fox and Raglan, The Early Houses of Monmouthshire (1951-54)

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