

## GOLDEN GROVE

<b>Ref number</b>	<b>PGW (Dy) 10 (CAM)</b>
<b>OS Map</b>	159
<b>Grid ref</b>	SN 5966 1984
<b>Former county</b>	Dyfed
<b>Unitary authority</b>	Carmarthenshire
<b>Community council</b>	Llanfihangel Aberbythych
<b>Designations</b>	Listed buildings: house and stable block Grade II
<b>Site evaluation</b>	<b>Grade II*</b>

**Primary reasons for grading** Golden Grove was for a long time one of the most important estates in west Wales. Its park and gardens contain many ancient trees. It retains good quality formal terraces and an outstanding arboretum associated with the Victorian house. The walled garden is of great interest in being associated with an earlier house and it contains a lake and canal which were probably in existence in the mid seventeenth century.

**Type of site** Formal terraces, gardens and pleasure grounds surrounding the present mansion; arboretum, pinetum, deer park and parkland. Walled garden on site of previous mansions incorporating lake and canal extant c. 1790.

**Main phases of construction** Lake and canal extant mid - late eighteenth century; gardens and arboretum associated with new mansion c. 1832. Some later re-modelling c. 1860 and later.

### Site description

Little is known of the first Golden Grove mansion, which probably stood on or near the site of the second. It was apparently built sometime around 1560 - 65 by John Vaughan; his grandson was knighted in 1628 and created Earl of Carbery. In 1670 it was assessed as having 30 hearths, a large residence by any standards. Dineley's folio number 223 in the *Progress of the Duke of Beaufort* (1684), is entitled 'Golden Grove and Dinevour Castle ruines', but all that can be seen is a large house amongst the trees. The entry in Lord Ashburnham's journal for 5 July 1687 recounted: 'We saw Lord Carbury's fine seate called Golden Grove; it is in a bottom near this river (Towy), very well wooded and seems to be a fine wholesom place'. In 1717 the mansion is said to be 'in a very large Park which is delicately wooded'. Sadly, this Elizabethan house was largely destroyed by fire in 1729.

The first mansion apparently remained in ruins until 1754, when a new residence was begun nearby and some surviving items were incorporated into the new house, such as the floors. John Vaughan of Shenfield, a distant cousin of the original builder, who had inherited

the estate in 1751, initiated the work and his son Richard, then living at Llandybie, supervised and directed it. At the end of December 1754 the house was 'almost habitable' and the lawns and gardens laid out. John Vaughan was never to live at Gelli Aur, preferring life in London, so the house was occupied by Richard.

After Richard inherited the estate in 1765, he made further changes to the house, including decorative plasterwork, carried out by the Polletti family of Carmarthen. A painting of the house from c. 1770, now in Carmarthen Museum, shows a large two storey house, each floor with a range of seven windows and seven dormer windows in the roof. Flanking the entrance doorway are two large pillars. To the north-east is a large wing of the same height. In a perspective view that appeared in the *Cambrian Magazine* in 1773 there is a further series of buildings to the south, including one that has tentatively been interpreted as a dovecote, is topped with what appears to be a cockerel weather vane.

Also in the perspective view is a small formal lawn to the south that does not appear on the eighteenth-century painting, although it does appear on the estate plans of 1790. An 'Old Orchard' of some 5 acres, the 'Kitchen Gar.' of 1.3 acres and a small formal sloping area in three divisions that together formed an area of c. 1.3 acres are also shown as are the lake, pond and canal, with further ponds to the south.

In 1804 Lord Cawdor of Stackpole Court inherited the Golden Grove estate from his friend John Vaughan. The Revd Thomas Beynon of Llandeilo, wrote several letters to Lord Cawdor to advise him of various aspects of the estate. Three letters from the Cawdor Collection held at the Dyfed Archives tell much about the events of the house and garden but not the name of the gardener. In March of 1804, Thomas Beynon reports that there is little money to pay the staff however they all appear to be going about their business as usual: 'The Gardener particularly: I have desired to take care of the Garden as usual and have allowed him three men & a woman to enable him to pay due attention to the Hot-Houses, to prune & nail the Fruit Trees, and to put in the usual succession of Crops in the Kitchen Garden. Should any change in public affairs enable your Lordship to pass part of the Summer at G Grove, more hands of course will be required to keep the Alleys, Walks & Grap plots in order; but, at present, I think the above numbers sufficient...I directed the Gardener, sometime ago, to send up to your Lordship some Pines that were then near ripe, which he tells me he did, together with some Sea Cale. There are four more Pine Apples coming on very fast, two of them will be fit to cut in about three days, and the rest soon after. They will be sent to Portsmouth successively as they become ripe'. The Revd Beynon then details the Demesne lands held by Mr Vaughan which totalled 777 acres.

Lord Cawdor had obviously required that work be undertaken to the lake and ponds and in his letter of 30 May 1804, Thomas Beynon was able to report that this work had now been done and that the problems with the flow of water had been resolved. In all his letters he refers to Mr Haines, who would appear to have been the steward or estate manager. In June, Mr Beynon acquainted Lord Cawdor with the events surrounding the theft of three 'Pine Apples' and how the culprit was eventually captured; in this letter he also refers to the Pinery, but gives no clue as to its exact location. He also refers to one of the glasshouses as the 'Westmead Hothouse', which might imply that it was formerly at Westmead in Pendine.

When John Frederick Campbell inherited the estate from his father in c. 1820 he commissioned the architect Wyattville to design a new mansion further up the hill. The second mansion was apparently demolished in 1826, although the site continued to be used as the walled kitchen garden, being modified several times until the present day.

On a more elevated position and about a kilometre from the sites of the first mansions, the new house appears to be much grander than it actually is. The plans drawn by Wyattville for the Earl of Cawdor in 1829 show a reasonably small mansion to the east of the complex and an extensive range of offices, utility rooms, storage areas and stables to the west. Early maps and photographs suggest that the house was constructed without significant alterations to these plans. The south facing, front, facade is dominated by an impressive carriage porch, with two small towers at the front corners linked by a castellated parapet. Behind this are the two stepped gable ends and in the centre of the mansion is an impressive square tower with four gables and steeply pitched roofs and with a clock on the south face. A photograph of c.1845 -50 shows that the carriage turning circle to the front of the house was constructed, as per the 1829 drawings, but this had disappeared by the time of the Allen photographs of 1871.

The southern entrance to the stables block is dominated by the huge dressed stone, rather perpendicular, entrance arch. In the centre, rising from the moulded stone parapet is a many sided finial. The original iron gates still hang on the southern end of the arch. Within the courtyard, the stables, brew house and utility rooms have been converted into classrooms, but there have been no substantial structural alterations. The only alteration evident from the south side is a small stretch of walling linking the stable block to the mansion.

The buildings are used as a satellite for Carmarthen College of Technology and Art, (Wildlife Illustration), whilst part of the grounds is designated as a country park.

The parklands and garden are set on the north facing bluff of the Towy valley some 3km west of Llandeilo. The land occupied by the park rises from some 50m AOD to 150m AOD. The original southern boundary is now masked by a commercial forestry plantation, which has also done much to destroy the woodland paths; for the purposes of this survey, the southern boundary is delimited by a forestry track and the course of an un-named stream. The western edge of the park is still, just, shown by what was once a substantial boundary wall that is now much tumbled, although still traceable. The north limit is given by the ha-ha that was associated with the second house (although it may be earlier) and the road to Carmarthen the B4300. To the east, the original boundary has been obscured by commercial plantings; for this survey the boundary is marked by a small stream and field boundaries.

Of the three drives from the east extant in c. 1840 two are still in use, whilst the third remains only as a difficult track. The main drive from the east was, and still is, off the B4300 about 1.5km from the mansion. Today this entrance is marked by one of the lodges that was probably built c. 1860. This is a simple, small, stone building, similar in design to other contemporary estate cottages. The drive follows a reasonably straight south-westerly course, crossing the small valley and stream by a single span, stone bridge before reaching the mansion. This bridge, built c. 1830, is probably the work of Morgan Morgan, the east Carmarthenshire bridge builder, and there is a reference in the Stackpole papers requiring that the bridge at Stackpole be built to a similar design.

The second drive that links in with the eastern approach is also off the B4300, to the west of the main drive, taking a route adjacent to the walled garden. Again, this entrance is marked by a lodge, similar to that at the main entrance, dating to c. 1860. The drive winds gently past the walled garden and a second lodge, now known as 'Eagle Lodge' before it crosses the grazed parkland and joins the main drive to the west of the bridge.

The third carriage drive that used to link with the main drive is actually from the south-west. At the top of the slope to the south of the mansion is a stony track leading to the east; this was the beginning of the drive. The drive followed the contours for much of its length,

eventually linking in with the main drive to the east of the small valley and bridge. This route is still traceable, but above the bridge it is now much impeded by commercial planting.

There has been no alteration to the course of the drive from the west since it was constructed *c.* 1830. The route is almost straight, following the contours from SN 5905 1955 to the mansion. The lodge at the entrance is smaller than the other two and brick built. The main east drive runs past the mansion and stable block and continues westwards as the west drive. This passes through the gate that is part of the arboretum boundary and is also the boundary between the College and the Country Park. From here the drive straightens until the exit approximately a kilometre from the gate. To the south of the drive is commercial forestry and to the north, rough grass that used to be part of the parkland. The drive is lined by a avenue of lime trees, thought to have been planted before 1860. On the north side there is also a line of immature limes, which was planted in 1986 by The Federation of Women's Institutes (Dyfed / Carmarthenshire Branches).

1871 photographs of the area of rough grass show open parkland with the occasional mature tree providing shade for the cattle. Today, this area is occupied by Country Park amenities. From this area there is a view through the trees to Paxton's Tower.

To the north of this area and the mansion is a small deer park bounded on the north by a stone wall that stands to a maximum height of 2.5m, although it is tumbled in places. To the west and east there is modern deer wire, whilst to the south the boundary mostly comprises the wall to the northern terrace. In the centre of the deer park, which occupies about 10 acres, are the remains of an iron rail fence, although no such boundary is shown on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map (1887). This map does show that there was a path across the deer park, heading north-east from the new section of north terrace. To the east of the deer park is more typical, grazed open parkland that originally covered an area of some 63 acres.

In the woodland to the west of the walled garden are the stone rubble remains of a circular icehouse. The roof has now gone but the walls still stand to *c.* 0.75m. The structure within descends below the present ground level, but to what depth could not be ascertained because of rubble, water and ice.

The plants within the park and garden fall into three phases, those planted prior to the building of the new mansion, those planted to complement it and recent, mostly commercial plantings. Throughout the gardens and parkland area are ancient oaks, *Quercus robur*, pre-dating the present mansion and were certainly growing in 1717 when the parkland was described as 'delicately wooded'. In the 1780s improvements made for John Vaughan included the planting of many trees including Weymouth pine, silver fir, larch, lime, spruce, Spanish chestnut and cedar of Lebanon.

The schedule of apportionments that accompanies the tithe survey of *c.* 1840 notes that there were some 420 acres of park and 183 acres within the demesne lands. It is known that the gardener by 1830 was a Mr Hill and it is believed that he was responsible for much of the layout and planting at Gelli Aur.

The north-facing hillside to the south of the arboretum is now mainly covered in twentieth-century commercial planting. However, some extremely mature oaks, including Holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) still flourish amongst the rows of conifers. Also within the commercial plantation, to the west, is the double domed, brick built reservoir that formerly supplied the house with drinking water. In the centre of the commercial plantation, towards the pinetum, is a small steep sided valley that has been cut by a small stream draining from the hillside. On the northern perimeter of this valley and somewhat masked by the new

plantings, is a walk or track, bordered in places by the ubiquitous *Rhododendron ponticum*. This still has something of the feel of a 'Ladies Walk' being not too steep a climb and, at the turn of the century, it would have been both beautiful and dramatic, with views across the valley towards Dinefwr Castle.

The gardens and arboretum lie to the north and south of the nineteenth-century house and were developed to complement it. To the north is a formal terraced garden; to the south are further grassed terraces, the arboretum, pinetum and a fernery.

The grass terraces were probably made between 1848 and 1850. A lithograph of *c.* 1848 shows the slope above the house, but as yet, no formal grassed terraces to the south of the drive and opposite it. Although rather unclear, they appear to be on the photograph of *c.* 1850. They certainly existed by 1871 and there are several delightful Allen photographs of five gardeners scything and brushing the grass. The terraces follow the curve of the drive and the slope of the ground so that they merge into the hillslope at the east and west ends. The length of the terraces decreases from the longest lower terrace, adjacent to the drive, which measures some 220m to the upper terrace which is only *c.* 150m. The lower terrace is *c.* 11m wide, gently sloping upwards to the steeper rise to the next terrace. The rise of *c.* 1m is steeply sloping. The next terrace is slightly less wide and separated from the next terrace, which is approximately the same width, by an identical rise. The grassed area of the upper terrace is *c.* 3.7m wide before it meets the gravel path. There is a further grass border between the path and the shrubs, but as these plants have matured they have masked some of it.

Also extant by 1871 was the wide gravel path and cut stone steps that lead up the terraces from opposite the main door. At the top the path meets the circular walk through the arboretum. At this junction is a semi-circular stone seat, which has smaller sets of steps of either side of it.

The terraces have been left as cut grass, with mature examples of rhododendron, mostly hardy hybrids to the west and east. To the west, where the terraces begin to merge with the hillslope and the arboretum, there are further plantings including a magnificent mature sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) and Irish yews (*Taxus baccata* cv. 'Fastigiata').

The area of the arboretum, some 10.5 acres, is up-slope, to the south of the mansion and the terraces. It is protected from deer by a substantial perimeter wall set in a ditch to form a ha-ha. From the base of the ditch this wall stands to a maximum height of 1 - 1.5m. The external perimeter ditch can still be seen clearly on the south and east sides, at its deepest, on the east side, this ditch is nearly 1.5m below the present ground level. Where the wall and ditch meet the drive, the ditch is less deep and the wall more prominent.

The arboretum is not contemporary with the construction of the house in *c.* 1830, neither is it shown on the 1854 plan that is in the Cawdor archives. The arboretum and perimeter wall would seem to date from the mid nineteenth century phase of construction and re-development that also saw the re-modelling of the walled garden and the extension of the terraces to the north of the house, *c.* 1860. However, there may have been some planting prior to the enclosure of the arboretum. The late Alan Mitchell (1975) gives planting dates in the 1860s. The Western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*) was planted in 1863, the Western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*) planted in 1866, the two *Thujopsis dolabrata* in 1868 and the Grand fir (*Abies grandis*) in 1869.

In a north-eastern corner of the arboretum is a small fernery, which consists of a narrow passage entrance, lined with water-sculptured limestone blocks, that opens on to a circular area. In the centre is a rustic summerhouse. The structure is six-sided, with a stout pole at each angle supporting a slate roof. Inside, in the centre, is part of a recently cut tree trunk. The hexagon

shape is emphasised by raised longitudinal patterns of stripped twig from the supporting poles to an internal hexagon, this hexagon being made up of twig triangles. Between the raised twig strips are pine boards on to which plates of different barks have been affixed. This structure was originally much more elaborate and decorated, with sides of unstripped pine and further fancy-work.

In addition to the arboretum, there was also a pinetum on the east side on a small valley to the south-east of the mansion. This area was not enclosed and has recently become so overgrown that it is difficult to negotiate. However, there are still some fine specimen trees including an, Chile Pine or Monkey Puzzle tree (*Araucaria araucana*).

Evidence from early surveys suggests that the long terraces to the north of the mansion were built in two phases. The tithe map indicates that the original terrace only extended behind the house and the utility block; no structure is shown behind the stable block. This interpretation is also shown on the 1854 plan in the Cawdor Archives. However, by the First Edition Ordnance Survey map (1887), the terrace has been lengthened and now extends behind the stable block. There is an Allen photograph (1871) that shows part of this new terrace, unplanted at that time. The old terrace is to the east whilst the newer terracing is to the west.

The house platform and terrace are retained by substantial dressed limestone wall that stands to a maximum height of 3m. It is topped with carved, pitched stones and there is a moulded course above the buttressed lower section. The wall and the terrace, which date from c. 1830, originally formed a rectangular shape with two projecting viewing areas at either end. These viewing areas give splendid, panoramic views: from the eastern end there is a view towards Llandeilo, Dinefwr Castle and beyond; from the west end there are views down the Towy valley towards Grongar Hill. Also in the west viewing bay there is a sundial that has lost its gnomon.

The planting scheme for the terrace has apparently changed little over the years. On the northern side, running parallel to the retaining wall is a neatly clipped box hedge that delimits a narrow border. Within this border is a series of trained (wired) Irish yews that are clipped both at the sides and on the top, so that the views from the mansion are retained. Interspersed with the yews are a variety of roses. This border is separated from the central garden area by a gravel path. In the middle of the central planting area is circular pond some 4 m in diameter, retained by a well cut, moulded, raised stone rim. In the centre is a simple jet fountain, that still appears to work, although lacking water pressure. To either side of the circular fountain are paths, a small grassed area and circular beds, in the centre of which are urns on pedestals. During the recent dry weather (1995) parch marks revealed the course of earlier paths and configuration of flower-beds now disappeared. This area is known as 'Lady Cawdor's Garden' as a flight of external steps used to link her room with this garden.

The extension to the original terrace was added between 1854 and 1887. Again, it is retained by a stone wall, but not of such fine quality workmanship. It is linked to the older terrace by a small gate and flight of steps. There is a central linear gravel path, to either side of which is a grassed area and shrubs. To the north, the shrubs are retained in a border edged with flat stone slabs. Behind this border there has been the addition of a fast growing conifer hedge, which now masks the views.

In addition to the bark house in the arboretum there is a further summerhouse or bark house to the west of the stable block and just to the east of the access gate through the protective arboretum wall. This is hexagonal, with a stout pole at each corner; three of the sides are clad, two are partially clad whilst the sixth side is left open for an entrance. All the cladding is

unplaned timber. Inside, there used to be a semi-circular seat against the sides that are clad, but this has recently been replaced with a modern, free-standing garden seat.

The walled, 'old' garden now occupies approximately 8.5 acres at the base of the northern slope of the Towy valley, at some 50m AOD. This area of the park has a long history of occupation. It is not known if there was a garden associated with the first mansion, which was destroyed in 1729, although the lake and canal may have been extant during the mid seventeenth century. During his enforced stay at Golden Grove from 1645 onwards, the minister, Dr Jeremy Taylor, is reported as taking his exercise on the lake and canal; he used the canal to reach his 'Meditation Corner'. Apparently, he also used to walk through the oak wood adjacent to the house and this walk still bears his name. Whilst it is difficult to be certain, it is quite probable that the canal referred to is the same as that which appears on the 1790 plan. The lake is in the east corner of the walled garden and the canal runs east - west, bisecting the garden.

That there was a garden, associated glasshouses and outbuildings contemporary with the second mansion, which was built in *c.* 1754 and deserted in *c.* 1826, is certain. The 1773 'Perspective view' shows a building that has tentatively been interpreted as a dovecote in the area of the garden wall in the forecourt of the Gardeners Cottage.

By 1840 an area of some 4 acres to the north of the canal had been enclosed and paths are shown around the perimeter and dissecting an irregularly shaped garden. Outside the garden enclosure, on the northern edge is a further small square enclosure, with what appear to be buildings at each internal angle; the function of these buildings can only be guessed at. The lake with its island and the canal are also clearly shown, although a small pond to the south, that appears on the 1790 plan, is not recorded. The configuration of the walled garden is little changed on the 1854 plan, except for the addition of the name 'Garden'.

By 1887 there had been some dramatic changes. The area of the garden had been almost doubled by the enclosure of land beyond the canal to the south. The configuration of the northern boundary has also changed; the boundary wall in the northern corner being re-aligned to enclose more land. The small square garden has vanished, probably under the newly constructed Gardener's Cottage, stables and glasshouses. Three areas of glass are now shown in the centre of the northern garden area. The lake and canal appear much as they did on previous surveys but with the addition of a small second pond clearly shown to the west of the lake.

The Gardener's Cottage is an L-shaped structure at the western end of the walled garden. The longer section of the building runs north - south. The house is of local stone with the smaller extension having a higher roof level than the main block. The gable ends of this extension are decorated with finials. The kitchen door, in the north wall of the extension, opens onto an area paved with large worn slabs, that might have been re-used from an earlier building.

The stable block is to the west of the cottage and consists of a tack room and five open bays. The stonework is of finer quality than that of the house, being dressed and coursed. The whole is slate roofed, which is now partly covered by wild clematis. At the western end of the stable block is a modern concrete block extension.

Opposite the stables, across the yard to the north is a building referred to by the owners as the Bothy. This building is on two levels, the lower floor, which is reached by a short drive, is lower than the present ground level.

Within the yard enclosed by the house, stable block and Bothy are several areas of glass, most of which are shown on the 1887 survey and all appear by 1905. The condition of these structures varies. Against the south-facing north wall there is a large lean-to house, which is

mostly still there, but it is in need of repair. The free-standing structure to the south has been repaired by the owners, as has the melon pit. To the west of these structures are the bases for pits of cold frames and the foundations of further structures are evident to the south of the Bothy.

Within the garden are two further large glasshouses, now somewhat overgrown, although the chimney stack from the boiler still remains.

The entire 8.3 acres is now enclosed by wall, however, there does appear to be variation in construction, suggesting several phases. The section of wall that forms the back wall to the lean-to glasshouse in the courtyard adjacent to the house is most interesting; it must be viewed from the north side. The wall here is thicker for most of its height, at *c.* 2.5m there is a slight hip indicating that the additional 0.5m was added at a later date. Within this section of the wall are three blocked entrances. The arches have been constructed of the local red sandstone and there is little variation between the size of the keystone and imposts. The top of some of these stones appear to have been rebated, suggesting that these stones were left exposed whilst the rest of the wall was rendered; no trace of this rendering exists today. The outside two arches are set 0.25m higher than the central arch. These features have tentatively been interpreted as a door and two windows. No date has yet been advanced for these openings. It is extremely tempting to suggest that they belong to the second mansion, except that all the openings shown on the 1773 view are square; so the possibilities remain that they either relate to the first mansion or that they were in some way associated with the redevelopment of the garden.

From this north-west section, the course of the wall is slightly south-east, kinking almost immediately after the entrance arch, to a course almost due east. The entrance arch is extremely well-built. The drive approaches at something of an angle and the dressed stones to either side have been cut to accommodate this. The arch itself is extremely shallow with predominant keystone, bearing the date 1854, the whole stands to just over 2.5m.

The south face of this north wall is lined with bricks, the north side stone. Within this north wall are two further, contemporary, entrances. One for pedestrians, the other possibly for vehicles. The whole wall stands to a maximum height of 3m. The wall to the south-east is stone, standing to a maximum height of 2.5m, it is tumbled in places, although there have been attempts at repair. The walls to the south and west are of similar construction.

The configuration of the lake has changed little over the centuries. In all the plans studied, the area of the lake has remained reasonably constant at *c.* 0.8 acres and the central island is also shown. Between the lake, which is now rather silted and overgrown, and the small pond to the west at the head of the canal, is a sluice. The sluice and surrounding stonework is of good quality and similar in style to the entrance arch; this would give the present sluice a date of *c.* 1860. However, in the stream bed at either side of the channel that leads from the sluice are somewhat worn sandstone flags which may pre-date the sluice. Clearing work has recently started on the lake (March/April 1996) during the course of which a brick perimeter path was partially uncovered.

The canal remains today as a somewhat overgrown stream and ditch. There have been modifications at its head. In the early plans (1790), the small pond is clearly shown as part of the canal; this remains the case until the 1887 survey. On this survey, and later ones, a small bridge is shown between the pond and the canal. This flat stone bridge *c.* 2.25m wide, is of similar construction to the sluice and was also probably part of the re-modelling *c.* 1860.



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