

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

SITE DOSSIER

SITE NAME St. Pierre Park

REF. NO. PGW (Gt) 29

OS MAP 162 GRID REF. ST 515905

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

DESIGNATIONS Listed building: House and gatehouse Grade
II*
National Park AONB SSSI NNR ESA GAM SAM CA
TPO no. 6

SITE EVALUATION Grade II

Primary reasons for grading

18th-century landscape park (entire), in origin a medieval deer park,
with older elements, lake, and very fine park trees

TYPE OF SITE

Landscape park, with remnants of earlier water features, Pleasure
Grounds, and walled kitchen garden

MAIN PHASES OF CONSTRUCTION

16th-17th century; 2nd half of 18th century

VISITED BY/DATE Elisabeth Whittle/March 1991

HOUSE

Name St. Pierre House

Grid ref ST 515905

Date/style Late 15th century - 16th century (with additions)/Tudor

Brief description: main building periods, architects, style, present state

St. Pierre House is situated on the Gwent coastal plain, near the Severn Estuary. It is set on level ground near the east boundary of the park. It is an irregular stone building approached from the N through a courtyard with a three-storey gatehouse and two storey ranges on the N and E sides. Just to the W lies the Norman (restored) church of St. Peter (or St. Pierre). The house is largely late 15th and 16th century in date, with later additions and alterations, and is Tudor in style. It was built by the Lewis family, who had lived at St. Pierre from the 13th century, and who remained here until the end of the 19th century, after which the house was let, and finally sold to the present owners.

OUTBUILDINGS

Name

Grid ref

Date/style, and brief description

THE PARK

Central grid ref ST 511905

Date/style

18th century/landscape park. Some earlier features

GENERAL DESCRIPTION, HISTORY AND LAYOUT

St. Pierre Park lies on rolling ground near the Bristol Channel, SW of Chepstow. It is bounded on the N and W by the Newport - Chepstow road (A 48), and on all but the E side by a stone wall. The ground is highest on the W side of the park, drops steeply down to the main central part, in which there is a large artificial lake of irregular outline with a massive curving dam at its S end (shown on 1781 estate map by John Aram). The park has two entrances, one to the N of the house, and one to the W. The N entrance and drive (straight), which are the present-day access, may be the original way in, as the main entrance to the house, and gatehouse lie to the N of the house. Before 1781 (John Aram estate map) a winding drive was landscaped into the park, running from an entrance off the Newport-Chepstow road on the W side of the park to the courtyard to the N of the house, skirting the N end of the lake. In 1781 there was no lodge at the entrance, but there was one to the S of the drive a little way into the park (now vanished).

The park is largely rolling grassland (now mown for golf courses) with isolated specimen trees (largely deciduous, with some old evergreen oaks). The western side is more wooded, with a plantation of larches on the steep slope. Some of the trees, in particular oaks, sweet chestnuts and planes, are very ancient, and some may be relics of earlier planting in the park.

The park has medieval origins, and was originally the deer park of the Lewis family, who lived here from the 13th century. The park engulfed a small medieval community, of which only the church remains. Even at the beginning of the 20th century it was a deer park, stocked with fallow deer (South Wales Daily News 1910). Along the eastern edge of the park, on low-lying ground, are a series of silted up and neglected linear ponds, strung out in a curve, one below the other, which are remnants of a pre-18th century layout. They are named in John Aram's 1781 map as (from N to S), 'The Upper Withy Bed', the 'Lower Withy Bed', the 'Stew Pond', and the 'Canal', alongside which was 'The Long Walk'. These features can still be made out, along with their overflow channels, and may be medieval in origin, although their development as ornamental features probably dates from the 16th or 17th century. The main phase of landscaping of the park was in the second half of the 18th century, and was probably done by Thomas Lewis, whose fine monument is in St. Peter's church. The lake was probably made then, as was the west drive. The 1781 map shows the upper part of the park, on the western edge, to be well wooded, with circular clumps either side of the entrance, and a warren to the south. The main area of the park is shown as open, with two groups of four trees each near the northern boundary, and a few trees lining the north drive, on its west side. By the late 19th century the park is shown dotted with trees, with the south boundary well wooded, so it follows that most of the trees in the lower part of the park, except for a few ancient oaks and sweet chestnuts, date from the 19th century.

The eastern side of the park is a level plateau, with the tree-lined drive in its northern half, and a further tree-lined road to Pill Cottage in its southern half. Although now largely golf course, the park trees survive, including an avenue of pines running E-W in the northern half.

It would appear that few changes were made to the park in the 19th century. A lodge was added at the W entrance, and presumably that

within the park was removed. The main changes have come with conversion to a Country Club and Golf Club in the present century.

STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

Drives

North drive

This is the present-day approach to the house. It is a straight tarmacked drive from the N side of the park (A 48) up to the car parks to the N of the house. This is probably the original approach to the house (pre-18th century).

West drive

This drive was probably made when the park was landscaped in the second half of the 18th century. It follows a sinuous course through the park, from the entrance off the A 48 road to the N side of the house (now car parks). In the lower part of the park it skirts the northern end of the lake. It is disused, and grassed over at its western end, although its course is clearly discernible throughout. The rest remains ungrassed, and is built of stone and gravel.

WATER FEATURES

The lake

The lake lies to the W of the house, in the lowest part of the park (now in the middle of the W golf course). It is a large sinuous lake of irregular outline, aligned N-S, with a large curving dam at its southern end. The dam is revetted with stone capped with clinker blocks (as on the top of the churchyard wall) on its inner surface. The field below it (to the S) was called Fish Pond Meadow in the 1781 map. At the W end of the dam is a stone-lined overflow channel (disused). Two golf course greens have been built out into the lake on its W side.

Water features to the E of the house

At the foot of the slope to the E of the house is a long string of disused and silted up ponds and channels (a modern channel has been made along their E side to drain off the water that used to fill them). These are probably medieval or Tudor in origin, and were (with the possible exception of the Canal, or Long Pond) utilitarian in function. Although overgrown and without their water they survive more or less intact.

At the N end are two level boggy rectangular areas, called on the 1781 map 'The Upper Withy Bed' and 'The Lower Withy Bed'. To the W of the latter is a small pond (shown on the map) with an artificial bank along its E side, and with some water still in it. An overflow channel runs southwards along the foot of the slope from this pond to E of the house, where there is a stone sluice with a damming mechanism. It then joins the channel on the E side of the ponds. South of the Lower Withy Bed is a large rectangular pond, now boggy, surrounded by raised banks. This is named 'The Stew Pond' on the 1781 map. The series continues at the foot of the slope, to the E and SE of the house, with the Long Pond, called the 'Canal' in the 1781 map. This is a long, narrow, straight-sectioned pond with a raised bank along its E and N sides. On the E bank was a path called 'The Long Walk' (1781 map). The pond is now only partly water filled, and has been broken up into segments by the making of four golf course fairways across it at intervals. Just E of the house the top of the pond has been filled in (also for a fairway), and its E and W edges show up as scarps in the grass. A water-filled channel runs parallel just to the E.

BUILT FEATURES

Walls

The park is bounded on the S, W and N by a substantial stone wall, still largely intact. On the S, to the W of the dam, it is c. 2 m. high, ragged in places, and with some gaps. There is a break at St. Pierre Farm, and the wall then continues, with a further gap, to the W side of the park. The wall along the W side is c. 2.2 m. high on either side of the entrance, and is continuous as far as the N entrance (broken down in places, but mostly standing to its full height).

Gates

The entrance on the W side of the park has square rusticated stone gate piers c. 3.5 m. high, topped with dressed stone architraves (the finials have gone). Between them are simple iron gates. Flanking the gate are iron railing screens and a pair of larger, rectangular stone piers similar to the gate piers.

Lodge

To the S of the entrance gates is a plain two-storey lodge with a 19th-century Gothic facade on its N side.

Boathouse and kennels

On the E edge of the lake, to the W of the kitchen garden, is a small boathouse with a stone back and side (N) wall, in which there is a doorway, a slate roof (renewed) and rustic wooden piers along the open front (now supported on cement barrels).

To its N, at right-angles to the water, is a long low stone building with a pent roof. This was the kennels.

PLANTED COMPONENTS

The main feature of the park is its magnificent trees, some of which appear to be very ancient.

There are three main areas of rough unmanaged woodland: first, on the steep slope between the upper and lower parts of the park to the W of the house, where there is mixed woodland, with larch predominating; secondly, along the W boundary (unmanaged deciduous woodland); and thirdly there is a strip of scrubby woodland along the series of ponds to the E of the house. This consists largely of scrubby alder, willow etc., with an understorey of laurels, rhododendrons and bamboos, probably introduced there in the 19th century.

The rest of the park is largely open grass (mostly golf courses) with numerous isolated trees throughout. The older ones are largely oaks, sweet chestnuts, planes and evergreen oaks. Mature evergreen oaks are conspicuous in the park, and there are good specimens near the W entrance, to the N and E of the kitchen garden, and near the Canal. Near the S boundary of the park are two old planes, and oaks line the old road through the S part of the park (only three on the E side). Outside the SW corner of the kitchen garden is a large old plane.

The lake is fringed with willows on its W side. Along the S boundary are some huge oaks and sweet chestnuts. Further large oaks and sweet chestnuts are dotted around the park to the W and N of the house. The N drive is flanked by rows of sweet chestnuts, horse chestnuts and oaks, and to its W is an outer row of sweet chestnuts (4), which may be part of the row shown on the 1781 map.

To the E of the drive there are a few isolated trees, including a few conifers, and a row of pines running E-W along an old field boundary.

BOUNDARIES

South: E half - fence; W half - stone wall

West: stone wall
North: stone wall
East: no physical boundary - area to the E now incorporated into golf courses

ESSENTIAL SETTING, VIEWPOINTS AND CONTINUATIONS OF FEATURES BEYOND THE PARK, EYECATCHERS ETC. (mark on map, and refer to as A, B, etc.)

Essential setting: open grassland (mostly golf course) to the E

LAND-USE

Most of the park is taken up with golf courses. There are a few areas of unmanaged woodland, and an area of boggy meadow to the SE of the dam ('Fish Pond Meadow' on the 1781 map).

ELEMENTS OF BOTANICAL OR OTHER NATURE CONSERVATION INTEREST

Old trees: sweet chestnuts, oaks and planes (deciduous) and evergreen oaks (evergreen)

SURVIVAL OF INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS

Structural components: good
Water features: good (but outline of lake spoilt by golf course greens)
Built components: fair
Planted components: good

THE PLEASURE GARDEN

Grid ref ST 515905

Date/style 18th-19th century/not known

GENERAL DESCRIPTION, HISTORY AND LAYOUT

The gardens, called 'The Pleasure Ground' on the 1781 map, lie to the S of the house, and are bounded on their S side by a low stone wall and ha-ha. The original outer court, to the N of the house, is now landscaped as a car park, but retains some old trees. The area to the E of the house, formerly 'The Ox Pen and Fold' (1781 map) and after that the 'Eastern Garden' (South Wales Daily News 1910), has now been built on. In the 'Eastern Garden' was a grotto, but of this there is no trace.

The garden to the S of the house was in existence by 1781, and to the S of it was a melon ground and 'The Old Orchard'. Very little of it is now left - only a few large trees and a large magnolia against the south wall of the house, which was mentioned in the South Wales Daily News article. Most of the garden area is now sloping lawn and part of a golf course, including a green.

STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

The ha-ha runs along the eastern half of the S boundary of the garden. It consists of a dry-stone revetment wall c. 0.7 m. high and an outer ditch much filled with debris. It runs as far as the Long Pond or Canal on the E.

BUILT COMPONENTS

Along the W side of the S boundary of the garden is a low dry-stone wall c. 1 m. high at the W end, and sloping down towards the E. Along the W boundary of the garden is an old stone wall c. 1.5 m. high, which runs along the E side of the old road. Inside it are modern tennis courts and an area of kitchen garden. To the E of the house the only remnant of the 'Eastern Garden' is a stone wall running N-S with an archway leading to stone steps down to a lower level (now built on).

ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENTS (e.g. edgings, ironwork, paving, plant containers, sculpture, seats, statues, sundials, treillage, urns)
Edgings to beds and borders

None

PLANTED COMPONENTS (lawns, trees and shrubs)

Most of the garden area to the S of the house is now lawn, golf course and green. The remnants of the old garden are a very large Magnolia grandiflora against the house, a large evergreen oak near the ha-ha, a very large plane and a large lime to the S, a clump of wellingtonias at the N end of the Long Pond or Canal, and a Californian redwood (Sequoia sempervirens) (main trunk cut down, sprouted again) just to the NW of it.

In the area of the original outer court (now car park) there are a number of old trees, in particular yews and evergreen oaks. There are also a number of ornamental conifers.

Reconstructions of original planted features

None

Special collections of garden plants

None

Documented living plants

Magnolia grandiflora on house (South Wales Daily News 1910)

Other (including elements of nature conservation interest)

None

ESSENTIAL SETTING AND VIEWS BEYOND THE SITE (Where important as the backdrop to garden. As for park, mark viewpoints on map, and refer to A, B, etc.)

Essential setting: park to S and E of house

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

None

SURVIVAL OF INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS

Structural components: poor

Built components: poor

Architectural ornaments: none

Planted components: poor

UTILITARIAN GARDENS

NAME Kitchen garden

Grid ref ST 514905

Date/style 18th century/walled kitchen garden

DESCRIPTION (categories as for the pleasure garden)

The walled kitchen garden lies to the W of the house, on the gentle slope between the house and the lake. It is shown on the 1781 map, and named 'The Park Garden'. It is four-sided, with a lean-to stone barn against the outer side of the S wall. Although most of its walls remain largely intact, the interior is now built on, with a number of chalets, modern roads, paths and flowerbeds.

The N wall is the most complete, standing to its full height of c. 3 m. It is stone on the outside and brick on the inside, and has a tile top at the E end and a brick top at the W end. In the middle is a new modern entrance (roofed). The W wall is stone, standing to its full height of c. 3 m., and has a large gap in the middle. The southern end has two large buttresses and traces of rendering on the outside. Its N end is lower and is rebuilt, with a gap entrance. The S wall is stone, c. 2.5 m. - 4.5 m. on the outside, and c. 1 - 3 m. high on the inside. There are two doors in it at the W end, with a break in the wall just E of them. Half way along the S wall is a barn against the outside of the wall. Its outer wall is stone, and the rest is timbered. N of the barn the wall stands to its full height, with a stone capping. There is a gap near the E end. The E wall is stone/brick, similar to the N wall, and stands to its full height, capped with tiles.

Just to the W of the kitchen garden are further lodges, road and car park.

SOURCES

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

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

Primary

'Maps of estates belonging to Morgan Lewis of St. Peer in the County of Monmouth Esq. 1765. John Aram': Gwent Record Office (D.501.1332)

South Wales Daily News, Nov 26th, 1910

Secondary

D. Williams, A History of Monmouthshire (1796)
