

PAXTON'S TOWER

Ref number	PGW (Dy) 49 (CAM)
OS map	159
Grid ref	SN 5416 1917
Former county	Dyfed
Unitary authority	Carmarthenshire
Community council	Llanarthney
Designation (Grade II)	Listed Buildings: Paxton's Tower (Grade II*); Tower Lodge
Site evaluation	Grade II*

Primary reasons for grading The tower, built as a memorial and eye-catcher, forms a spectacular picturesque landmark overlooking the Tywi valley and is visible for miles around. It was the only folly designed by the well known architect S.P. Cockerell.

Type of site Folly tower

Main phases of construction 1808-15

Site description

The Tower, sometimes referred to as Nelson's Tower or Paxton's Folly, occupies the summit of the escarpment known as Allt Pistyll-Dewi or Allt Fawr, overlooking the Towy Valley. Built in military gothic style, it is an impressive and conspicuous landmark for miles around and from it there are spectacular and panoramic views, particularly over the Tywi valley to the north. The tower stands on an open, grassy summit, with native trees lower down the slopes. The route of a carriage drive leading up the south-west flank of the hill to the tower is visible in places in the grass.

The tower is triangular, three storeys high, built of coursed local rubble stone. It is topped by a smaller hexagonal look-out tower, with crenellated parapets and six round-headed, now blocked, windows. There are tall round turrets at the corners and three arched openings on the ground floor, above which are mullioned windows. Formerly, the windows contained stained glass and the second floor was used as a banqueting hall. An early description by S. Lewis refers to a sumptuous banqueting room. Stone inscription panels on the walls are now blank.

The tower was designed by the well known architect S.P. Cockerell for Sir William Paxton of Middleton Hall nearby. It was built in 1805-1815. There is doubt over exact dates depending upon which source is read. The inscription certainly places it after October 1805 and Carlisle's *Topographical Dictionary* states that it was being built in 1808, when he was collecting material for his book. Crimmin draws attention to the faint, unsigned, pencil drawing of the tower c. 1803 in a collection of drawings by S.P. Cockerell's son, C.R. Cockerell, in the

RIBA Library. Although the tower has been attributed to C.R. Cockerell, this is felt to be unlikely as he did not enter his father's drawing office until 1805.

Whenever it was designed and built, S.P. Cockerell's only folly must occupy one of the finest sites in Britain and to use the term in its post 1790 context, it was a successful attempt to create the Picturesque. Although said to be dedicated to Nelson, who was a friend of Paxton, and his victories, local legend maintains that the tower was built as an act of spite. Sir William Paxton was determined to be elected MP for the area and to encourage the eligible men to vote for him, he promised to build a much needed bridge across the Towy, near the Wern Bend. When the good people failed to elect him, he is said to have used the money to build the folly instead, just to prove how wealthy he was. In visual terms, its main purpose was as an eye-catcher for the house and park of Middleton Hall, to the south-west.

Below the tower, about 100 m to the south-west, is a small, single-storey cottage with a partially stone-walled garden. It has been restored by the Landmark Trust. The cottage is a two-unit, two-window building of rubble stone, with a slate roof. It does not appear on the estate sale plan of 1824 but is one of two cottages marked as 'lodge' on the 1831 Ordnance Survey map and therefore was probably built during the period when Middleton was owned by E.H. Adams. It was occupied by the caretaker for the tower. On later maps it is called Tower Lodge.

Sources

Sale plan of Middleton Hall estate, 1824, in N.D. Ludlow, 'Middleton Hall Assessment' (Dyfed Archaeological Trust, 1995), fig. 5.

Secondary

Lewis, S., *A topographical dictionary of Wales* (1833).