

## BUCKLAND HOUSE

<b>Ref No</b>	<b>PGW (Po) 6 (POW)</b>
<b>OS Map</b>	161
<b>Grid Ref</b>	SO 131214
<b>Former County</b>	Powys
<b>Unitary Authority</b>	Powys
<b>District</b>	Brecknock
<b>Community Council</b>	Talybont-on-Usk
<b>Designations</b>	National Park: Brecon Beacons. Site of Special Scientific Interest: coach house.
<b>Site Evaluation</b>	<b>Grade II</b>
<b>Primary reasons for grading</b>	The survival of the structure of a grand Edwardian formal garden in a fine position in the Usk valley. The garden and grounds contain some good specimen trees and shrubs and a notable tennis pavilion designed by H. Avray Tipping.
<b>Type of Site</b>	Extensive country estate. Wild garden; parkland; formal gardens.
<b>Main Phases of Construction</b>	c. 1765, c. 1836-40, c. 1895 on.

## SITE DESCRIPTION

Built in 1895, Buckland House (also called Crosfield House) is situated on level ground halfway down the west side of Buckland Hill which rises steeply behind it. The house is in the centre of the extensive, but linear historic estate, and it is reached by a drive, approximately 2 km long, from the A 40 above the site to the north. The house faces west, looking out over the river Usk running below, south-west to Tor y Fol and west towards Brecon.

The present house, designed by S. W. Williams in about 1900, is of local reddish stone in an Elizabethan manner with high gables. It faces west and south. The north front is dominated by a porte-cochere, the west by an open, colonnaded loggia. The

interiors have been institutionalised but an impressive 'Elizabethan' wood staircase and a 86ft long gallery survive.

This house replaced an earlier Buckland, dating from about 1765, which was built for a Roderick Gwynne, who himself replaced an earlier Jacobean house of about 1600 belonging to the Games and the Jones families. Gwynne's house had a strong Palladian influence with a colonnaded and pedimented north-east front, which is shown in a surviving illustration. Remodelled in 1836-40 for Major Gwynne-Holford, the house was destroyed by fire in 1895.

The Gwynne-Holfords were among the wealthier Welsh gentry, owning five separate estates in South Wales by 1900. They kept Buckland as a sporting estate until 1935 when it was sold at auction following the death in 1928 of Lord Buckland of Bwlch (benefactor of Bronllys Hospital and political host). The estate was broken up, the house and grounds were bought by Sir David Llewellyn who sold on in about 1945, following the billeting of the house during the war, to the British Legion as a hospital, at which point the house was renamed Crosfield. The house remained in institutional use until the mid-1980s when it was purchased as a training and conference centre by the Buckland Hall Trust, which renamed the house.

Approximately 200m north-east of Buckland House is an extensive stable court, facing west. It probably dates to c. 1800. The court is enclosed to the west and east by buildings. An impressive, ornamental arch in the south-west corner creates the main entrance for a service drive which continues through the area to the north towards the estate office and laundry. There is no formal northern exit gate.

On the east of the court is a long, two-storeyed, stone E-shaped range; the carriage house, later garage. Ten coach arches survive but most were bricked in when the building changed use in about 1920. Blue, wooden garage doors survive. The upper storey of the building would have been used for storage and staff accommodation. Part of this building now houses a bat colony. The stables are on the west side of the court. There was stabling for sixteen horses (Sale Catalogue, 1935), most of these survive intact.

Approximately 10m north-east of the north-eastern corner of the carriage house is an engine/generator house. A small, stone and brick building it appears to be sound but is presently unused. About 10m north-west of the stable court, in a hollow below the service drive, is a smoke house. It is derelict and has partly collapsed. It is possible that part of this building would have also served as a game larder.

Approximately 12m up the slope immediately behind the centre of the carriage house is a shaded and damp slope which contains two important features: an ice-house ( SO 133215) and a possible fernery. The ice-house is not marked on any Ordnance Survey map but is believed to have been in existence for at least 100 years. A curving, brick chamber descends about 8m into the ground. The ice-house faces west and is lined

with what appears to be tufa, loose rocks of which lie in the undergrowth around. The mouth of the ice-house has been barred for security.

To the south of this feature are the remains of a broken down building which is believed to have been a fernery. No formal record of this feature has been found but the microclimate of Buckland is such that some rare, exotic ferns have survived among the rubble, which have been identified by botanical experts as being those associated with such a building.

The park lies to the north-west of Buckland Hill and covers about 200 acres. The park was part of a once much wider estate of farmland and forestry which, on the western side of Buckland Hill, extended to about 1,000 acres. The parkland curves down from the north-west end, south of the village of Llansantffread, in the shape of an inverted comma, opening out to cover the fields west of the house. The south drive ran on from the house, through farmland, to leave the site about 1 km to the south on the Llangynidr road. The park is bordered on the west by the river Usk and on the east by the forestry plantations of Buckland Hill. Traces of an old drive which descended from Llansantffread can still be seen in the north-east park as a level terrace in the pasture. In the north-west park there is a small holding; the Elms and near the centre of the park, at the eastern end of the garden outpost, the Dingle (see Garden) there is a second small holding, now a pig farm, Sunnybank (outside registered area). Buckland Farm stands on the east of the main north drive which creates the north-east boundary of the park. This drive descends down the steep hillside off the A 40 to the north, opposite Talybryn Lodge. Within the park hedge and dry-stone wall field boundaries survive as does a limited amount of open parkland planting of oak, chestnut and ornamental conifers, particularly in the field to the west of the old tennis courts. There are no significant plantations within the park. The park is managed as permanent pasture.

It is presumed, in consideration of the position of the house, that the first recorded house dating from about 1600, belonging to the Games family, lay in some sort of grounds. The extent and appearance of these grounds are unknown. Roderick Gwynne's house of 1765 is believed to have been surrounded by a park, but again no detailed information has been found. The first real information comes on a tithe map of 1840 which recorded an 'old house' in the vicinity of Llanfellte Farm, suggesting that this was the original manor/house. As already suggested the construction of a new house in a more private location could possibly be indicative of the creation of a park.

The Ordnance Survey 25 inch map of 1809-36 records the parkland in the form it retained until the sale in 1936, as described above, with the main drive, now lost, entering the site from the Lodge opposite Llansantffread church to the north-west. This map also recorded an area of 'rough park' to the north of the stables, later the site of tennis courts. Interestingly the 1888 Ordnance Survey map records the meadows on the river's bank to the west of the house as being outside the park. By 1905 these

have apparently been reincorporated. The plantations and park planting recorded in 1888, the plantation west of the lake, along the line of the Dingle and within the north-western park, appear unchanged in 1905.

The native woodland of Buckland Hill is believed to have been gradually replaced by conifers from the mid nineteenth-century. In the time of Major Gwynne Holford (1836-40), in celebration of the British victory at the Battle of Waterloo, at which he fought, blocks of conifers were planted on the western hillside imitating the ranks of British infantry and cavalry. This woodland army survived in form until about 1940 from which point it was gradually depleted. Major Gwynne Holford's pride in Waterloo also extended to design schemes for the garden.

A single ride is recorded in the woodland running from the laundry in the north around the lower slopes of the hill, above the ice-house, connecting about 1/2 km south of the house with a second ride, now a footpath, which returned to the north back over the top of Buckland Hill. The beginning of this ride is now a rough path.

About 100m south-west of the house, below the main drive, a path was recorded on both of the Ordnance Survey maps running downhill, through the hanging woodland, to the river. The last part of this path descended the steep slope in a series of switchbacks. This path still survives in form but is overgrown. In 1888 a boat house was recorded near this point on the river. This had disappeared by 1905, being replaced by a boat house on the lake. Neither Ordnance Survey map records an iron suspension bridge which crosses the river at this point. The Gwynne Holfords relocated the bridge from one of their Carmarthenshire estates, but the date of the exercise is unknown.

When the estate was sold in 1935 the park totalled 450 acres and was described as being 'finely timbered with two entrance lodges, woodlands, walks' and 'attractive views'. Many of the features of the park from this period have survived and there have been no major physical changes since that time.

The formal gardens at Buckland House lie to the south of the house on a series of terraces which descend the hillside to the west. The gardens are linear, following the contours of the Buckland Hill which encloses them along the east. In about 1900 it seems that the gardens were extended up into the lower, wooded slopes of the hill. Below the gardens to the west, a strip of Forestry Commission plantation (outside of the registered area) runs downhill to the river. Traces of old paths, connecting the garden to the suspension bridge, remain in the area but there is no sign of any ornamental planting. Within the park there is an area of wild planting along a small stream to the west of Buckland Farm, below Sunnybank.

The south front of the house looks out on to the terraced formal gardens. From the south-east corner of the house a wide, raised grass terrace runs south for approximately 100m. It appears that a central path ran along this terrace and

continued beyond the terrace into the southern garden, which is now partly overgrown. The path is now grassed over. This terrace is bordered on its eastern side by banks of mature rhododendrons which have colonised the lower woodland of Buckland Hill and on the west it descends to a lower lawn.

About 30m south of the house, along this terrace, there is a fine ornamental, Italianate stone stair ascending the hillside in alternate flights of stone steps. These stairs appear to date from around 1910 and lead to a set of walks in the lower woodland above the house. Traces of these walks survive in stone steps and dry-stone retaining walls which have been uncovered. The majority of the walks are still overgrown.

Towards the southern end of the terrace it appears to become wider, curving in towards the west. Two separate, ornamental flights of stone steps connect the terrace with a wide, curving lawn about 2m below. This lawn is known as the 'Archery Lawn' and its length, about 50-70m, and the presence of a raised earth bank at its northern end suggest that it could have been the site of an archery butt.

Below the Archery Lawn on the west there is a terrace of three square, interconnecting garden enclosures. All are overgrown and it appears that connecting steps between them and from the lawn above have been removed. The central enclosure has a sunken centre, suggesting a possible pool but no other evidence was found to support this. The two flanking enclosures contain mature ornamental conifers. All of the enclosures are partly surrounded by Irish or golden yew hedges, in variable condition, which appear to retain evidence of earlier topiary work.

West and south-west of these gardens a network of overgrown paths leads through a small arboretum. About 10m south-west of the south-western corner of the southern most enclosure there is an overgrown maze of yew and hornbeam. About 10m south of this feature there is another square, formal enclosure divided by stone edged cruciform paths into four beds which contain azaleas. This garden lies on a south-westerly slope. The east/west central path has two single, stone steps to accommodate the changes in ground level and a wide, ornamental flight of stone steps creating a formal western access.

The southern area of the garden is characterised by trees and shrubs planted in rough grass. It appears that this area could have been a 'wild garden'. Overgrown circulatory paths run through the area connecting to the remains of a classical, curved seat set in an overgrown yew arbour and to the remains of a collapsed building, possibly a summer house, at the southern most point. North-west of the site of the building a small flight of rustic stone steps leads up to connect with the southern end of the terrace path mentioned above.

The loggia on the west front of the house opens on to the southern continuation of the main drive. Beyond the drive a small area of lawn is enclosed by a formal crenellated hedge of Irish yew. Immediately west of the hedge the ground descends steeply to the west in two broad grass terraces. A simple wire fence separates the western edge of

these terraces from the park beyond. There is no sign of any ha-ha or a similar ornamental garden/park division.

South-east of the loggia, and immediately south of the house, there is a level area of lawn planted up with four mature yew and holly topiaries in a square arrangement. Parchmarks surrounding them suggest that they were enclosed by a square hedge. To the south of these topiaries there is a large, squarish block of Irish yew made up of at least four trees.

Behind the yews a grass terrace falls to the level of the archery lawn, the terrace bank being the northern end of the lawn. A walk ornamented with alternate Irish and golden yews proceeds west from the northern end of the lawn above the garden enclosures for their width, connecting with an overgrown path which runs south along their western side. At the eastern end of this walk a flight of ornamental stone steps ascends to the lawn above. To the north of this yew walk, about mid way along its length, there is the remains of a large, circular stone fountain basin or pool. Ornamental stone work from this feature lies in the rough grass around it.

There have been formal gardens on the present site since at least 1840 when a tithe map recorded a lawn, a flower garden and the terraces to the south of the house. The terraces appear to have had a similar arrangement of enclosures, two of which appear to have contained water. Two small, unidentified buildings also appear to have existed within the enclosures. The structure of the gardens seems to have remained unchanged and has only been augmented through planting during later periods.

(It has been suggested that the garden of 1840 may be on the site of an earlier garden dating from about 1600 as tentative archaeological investigation has suggested that the upper terrace contains a stone wall and that the garden enclosures are characteristic of an Elizabethan layout - this could perhaps also explain the Archery Lawn, of which no reference has been found. However, archery was also a popular Victorian pastime).

The main planting of the gardens appears to have been undertaken from about 1800 by the Holfords and Gwynne Holfords, who had family connections with Westonbirt Park, Gloucestershire. It is believed that many of the ornamental conifers, some of which were planted in a 'Conifer Walk' south-west of the maze, originated from the Westonbirt estate. It is also assumed that the family were responsible for establishing the rhododendrons within the garden.

Major Gwynne Holford continued his celebration of the British victory at Waterloo within the garden. On the south front of the house he planted four topiary trees within a yew enclosure, representing a battle formation and about 10m to the south he planted four Irish yews in a block around a statue of the Duke of Wellington, representing the battle command. The planted features, apart from the hedge, survive but the statue has been lost.

In the 1935 Sale Catalogue the gardens were said to include an Italian garden, a rose garden, an American garden, a blue garden, the maze, and a rhododendron bank. The location of these features, apart from the rhododendron bank and the maze, is unknown but it is probable that the rose, Italian and blue gardens were within the garden enclosures and the American garden to the south. The maze is supposed to be a small version of the Hampton Court maze. Its planting date is, however, unknown.

The built garden features, the seats, paths and possible summer house, appear to be later additions, from about 1890 on. Possibly they are replacements of earlier versions. The Italianate steps on the east of the upper terrace do appear to date from around 1900 as their style and design are characteristic of Edwardian gardens. Photographs in the 1935 Sale Catalogue also record highly ornamented gardens with many statues, urns and wide, stone edged gravelled paths.

The one noted garden designer to have worked on the site was H. Avray Tipping in about 1923 who is credited with creating a lily/iris garden for his political friend, Lord Buckland. From the Sale Catalogue it appears that this was outside the garden, either near the tennis courts or within the Dingle. This would seem appropriate as Tipping became known for wild/water gardening.

After 1935 the gardens deteriorated. Statuary and ornaments were lost through vandalism, theft or sale and labour intensive areas of the gardens were abandoned. The trees within the garden, as well as the park, were depleted during and after the Second World War for firewood and the trees within the garden continued to be used as a source of firewood for local Scouts until recently. Little care had been taken of the gardens until the 1980s and in many ways it is pleasing that so much has survived.

## Sources

- Primary** Ordnance Survey map, 1809-36, 25"  
Tithe map, 1840, National Library of Wales.  
Sale Catalogue, 1935 containing photographs. National Library of Wales  
The Mayberry Collection, National Library of Wales, contains various papers relating to the Buckland Estate from about 1850 on.
- Secondary** Haslam, R., The Buildings of Powys, (1979), p. 306  
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Jones, T., The History of Brecknockshire, (Glanusk edn 1909), p. 288  
Lloyd, T., The Lost Houses of Wales (1989 edn), p.49.