

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

**REGISTER ENTRY**

**Merrixton House Farm**

**Ref number** PGW (Dy) 37 (PEM)

**OS map** 158

**Grid ref** SN 1446 0810

**Former county** Dyfed

**Unitary authority** Pembrokeshire

**Community council** Amroth

**Designations** None known

**Site evaluation** **Grade II**

**Primary reason for grading**

The utilitarian garden and possibly the formal pond predate the Tithe Award Survey of 1846. The house, which was built in about 1750, and gardens were substantially remodelled around 1880 and a row of lime trees are possibly from this period. There are terraces and an unusual viewing mound within an enclosed garden adjacent to the house as well as a parish lock-up.

**Type of site** Terraced garden from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, although some features appear to be earlier

**Main phases of construction** Probably around 1880 with a re-use of existing features

**Site description**

Merrixton House and its gardens are set in the low rolling hills about 2 kilometres to the north of Wiseman's Bridge and the Pembrokeshire coast. The whole area is one of established wealth, much of which was based on coal extraction, such as at Colby Lodge and Kilgetty. The coal was presumably used in the nearby ironworks at Stepside, and beyond. The south-west facing hill of the small formal garden area adjacent to the house has been terraced and the average height is somewhere around 130 metres AOD.

This is one of those delightful and ancient properties about which none of the usual authorities agree. It is probably true to say that there was a property here in the seventeenth century. This was enlarged in the eighteenth century and reduced again in the nineteenth century. The result is an eclectic mix of styles.

Jones (1996) suggests that the original name was Meyrickston. He also suggests that in 1760 it was the home of Evans Williams and in 1773 of John Martin. However, a letter held in the archives of the National Monuments Record (Aberystwyth) written by D Owen-Jones in 1986 suggests that in 1762 the house was greatly extended by Squire Swann or his family; the squire being deputy sheriff of Pembroke at that time. Jones does record William Brock Swann Esq as living at Merrixton, but in 1848. Some of the confusion may be explained by two properties practically adjacent (Merrixton and Great Merrixton) having similar names. Indeed, the Tithe Award Survey of 1845 gives only the name 'Merrixton' on the map when referring to 'Great Merrixton' and Merrixton House is scarcely annotated.

The present owners are of the opinion that Squire Swann did indeed live at Merrixton in the mid eighteenth century and that it was he who extended the house. He was also responsible for the small building which has been referred to variously as a 'dovecote' or 'lookout' but which was probably a prison.

A.J.Parkinson, then of the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales, records that Merrixton is a large late eighteenth-century double pile house, with earlier rear wing: much altered in about 1880. The eighteenth-century block is believed to have been built for Charles Swann; the property subsequently became part of the Picton estate. Major works were undertaken in about 1877 when it was reduced from three to two storeys. The main front block is dated 1762. The central front door has a semi-circular fanlight with cast iron radiating glazing bars with floral decoration. There are two rooms and a central hall to each 'pile'. In front of the house at SN 1442 0807 is a small landscape feature, a decorative pond with the backing wall being parallel with the curved boundary wall. The remainder of this description relates to the garden and will be included under that section.

Alterations to the house have continued into this century with a porch and small terrace retaining wall being added in the 1950s or early 1960s. The buildings which make up the house complex are now rendered and painted and the external appearance gives no real indication of such a venerable history.

Across the small lane and to the north of the house is a modest, mainly two-storey, rubble built farm complex, part of which, (the buildings to the north and south of the west range), probably appears on the 1845 Tithe survey. The remainder of the complex of barns, cattle sheds and other outbuildings were possibly added about the time of the 1880 rebuild as they appear on the Ordnance Survey map of c 1888. This early survey also shows a circular threshing floor to the east of the extant barns. This area is now occupied by modern farms buildings. To the west of the farm complex is the walled garden; the eastern wall of the garden forms the western wall of the farm yard.

The gardens associated with Merrixton are to the west and south of the house complex and seem to have been originally conceived as a series of terraces, using or being built into the natural slope. To the north is a walled garden, which evolved into the utilitarian garden and to the west is the formal garden, which may have originally extended further to the south. These gardens appear to have been extant in 1845.

The 1845 Tithe Award Survey shows the house as an insubstantial L shape in parcel 962. To the west of this parcel is an almost square plot of somewhere around 2 - 3 acres but without an identification number. In the north-east corner of the plot, a small rectangular enclosure is also shown and to the west, the boundary is shown to 'bulge'. To the west of the 'bulge' is a semi-triangular plot which is referred to as 'The Green' (No 877). In the forty or so years between the Tithe Award Survey and the First Edition Ordnance Survey map there have been considerable changes to both the house and gardens. What is not clear from the mapped evidence is whether the small, formal pond (see below) which occupied the 'bulge' in 1888 (and which still occupies it today) was extant earlier in the century.

Today there is a small formal terrace to the front of the house which leads on to the west-facing, sloping lawn and planted borders. Here are recent plantings of *Hebe*, *Phormium*, *Geranium*, gold and silver leaved hollies, loniceras and at least one *Auracaria*. These occur in plantings between the upper and lower areas of the lawn. To the south of the lawn and these plantings is a row of mature limes. The present owners believe that these are contemporary with the re-modelling of the garden in the late nineteenth century. From their height and girth, this might indeed be the case. Also possibly surviving from this time is a fine beech.

The plantings associated with the lower area are, again, more recent and include pampas, *Cornus*, *Rhododendron*, *Yucca*, contorted hazel, broom arundinarias and roses. Most of the planting is to the east of the pond.

Between the pond area, which is separated from the Green several feet below by a high revetment wall, is the start of a small valley. Cutting across the wooded sides of the valley are earthworks which may represent tracks, former drives (pre 1845) or walks through a 'Wilderness Area'.

To the west of the valley and to the south of the present house, where the land is less steep, is a sub-rectangular enclosure. This, again, seems to have been terraced at some stage and it contains a viewing mound and the former gaol. This was later may have been used as a summerhouse / dovecote but it is now a shelter for a pony.

Using evidence from the maps, it would seem that the former drives from the east and west have become public roads; indeed there are stone gate posts associated with the Green and former west drive. Today there are no stretches of private drive and the public road separates the house from the walled garden.

Today there are two small ponds at Merrixton, both of which are associated with the stream which is thought to start from the spring in the walled garden. From the walled garden it is piped under the former drive (now a public road) to feed the upper pond. From the upper pond, there is a sluice arrangement which allows the overflow to tumble down a small cliff into a lower and possibly later pond.

Curiously shown on modern maps as a well and not as a body of water, the upper, formal pond was extant certainly at the end of the nineteenth century, if not earlier. The shape is rectangular, being about 50 ft long by 30 ft wide (15.2 x 9.1 metres). Mid-way along the west edge is a semi-circular addition; this shape is echoed by the retaining wall, which stands to just over 1.5 metres. Planted around the pond are laurels, hebes, bamboos, *Gunnera*, *Acanthus* aquilegias and ferns. To the north-west is a twenieth-century summerhouse with stone walls and slate roof. This has recently been re-built / restored by the present owners

Reached by a steep flight of steps from the upper pond, the lower pond is set about 5 metres below and to the south of the smaller, formal pond. This pond is sub-rectangular in shape, to the north is a small cliff and to the south is the retaining stone-

faced dam. A sluice allows the overflow to return to the course of the stream in the valley below.

The entire garden area is surrounded by a stone boundary wall, which varies from some 2 m in height to a little under a metre.

Immediately to the south of the house is an enclosure of about 0.5 of an acre. Here the land is less steeply sloping but there is what appears to be a terrace wall running almost mid-way along its length. In places, this wall remains to just over 0.5m and, just discernible are six or so steps at the northern end. At the southern end of this enclosure are two extremely well-built and striking features namely the mound and a small building, the parish lock-up.

The mound is in the south-east corner of the enclosure. Here a ramp extends from the terrace below. This ramp, at its maximum, is about 4 metres higher than the terrace and it is retained by a well-built stone wall. At the southern end, the ramp widens into a circular platform. Because of the natural lie of the land, the platform is the same height as the field to the east but is above the field level to the south. Mounds or viewing mounds appear in gardens into the eighteenth century. It may be that this mound was constructed at or about the same time as the house, that is about 1750. It certainly gives an excellent view across the countryside and Tom Lloyd is of the opinion that there would have been a summerhouse or shelter on the circular platform.

Referred to variously as a dovecote or summerhouse, the original purpose of the small square building was far more prosaic. It was initially constructed as a parish lock-up at the time when Squire Swann was deputy sheriff of Pembrokeshire. The stone walls stand to some 4 m high, these support the pyramidal roof, which has recently been restored by the present owners. At ground-level is a single wide door, whilst the upper floor is reached by an external flight of simple stone steps.

From both the viewing mound and the lock-up there are stunning views to the south.

The walled kitchen garden is across the small lane to the north of the house. It was already in existence in 1845 and may date from the construction of the house in about 1750. The stone wall, which stands to some 2 – 2.5 m, encloses a rectangular garden; the north and south walls being some 200 ft (61 m) and the east and west walls being about 185 ft (56 m). Annotation on the First Edition Ordnance survey map of the 1880s shows seven apparently randomly planted trees; this may indicate that it was a pleasure garden at the time rather than an orchard.

There are two existing entrances to the garden and two former entrances, now blocked. To the south, opposite the house, is a pedestrian entrance with a wooden door and elaborate iron hinges. The stonework around the door is relatively inferior to some elsewhere within the garden and it is possible that this entrance was made during the re-modelling in the nineteenth century. A path from this entrance along the east wall is shown on the First Edition survey. Along the east wall and opposite the farm complex is a wider arched entrance, this stands to a little under 2 m. Again, the stone work is not of good quality. To the north and west are two further entrances, now blocked. The arched entrance along the north wall again stands to some 2 m and is about 1.5 m wide. The stone blocks used in the construction of this entrance are larger and better cut than the two previous entrances. However, the most intriguing entrance is that in the west wall, again now blocked. The top of this entrance is now mainly obscured by ivy but it is still possible to make out two, well built stone gate piers 2 – 2.5 m apart between which is stone arch. When originally constructed, this

would have made an impressive entrance. This, of course begs the question into what and why. The two blocked entrances are too grand for a utilitarian garden of this scale. This being the case, they could have been constructed at the time of the original house and have been part of that house complex.

Today, the interior of the garden is mostly overgrown although there is an interesting wet area towards the centre, which may represent the source of the small stream which feeds the ponds.

## **Sources**

### **Primary**

Lloyd T, letters in private collection.

Parkinson, AJ survey details and correspondence held in the National Monuments Record, Aberystwyth.

Tithe Award Survey & Schedule of Apportionments (1845): National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

### **Secondary**

Jones F, *Historic houses of Pembrokeshire & their families*, (1996), p130