

## EDWINSFORD

<b>Ref No</b>	<b>PGW (Dy) (CAM)</b>
<b>OS Map</b>	146
<b>Grid Ref</b>	SN 6312 3457
<b>Former County</b>	Dyfed
<b>Unitary Authority</b>	Carmarthenshire
<b>Community Council</b>	Llansawel
<b>Designations</b>	Listed buildings: Edwinsford Grade II*; Bridge Grade II
<b>Site Evaluation</b>	<b>Grade II</b>

**Primary reason for grading** Vestiges of parkland including oak avenue possibly *c.* 1635. Fine bridge linking utilitarian area, including walled garden, coach-house, gardener's cottage to the mansion. Many of the buildings were topped with lead ornaments that depicted their function, now sadly gone. Family associations with Sir Joseph Banks, who spent several summers at Edwinsford.

**Type of Site** Woodland and parkland surrounding pleasure garden and house, now somewhat degenerated.

**Main phases of construction** *c.* 1635, mid/late eighteenth century, nineteenth century re-modelling.

### SITE DESCRIPTION

The site of Edwinsford is idyllic. In this part of the Cothi valley, the geology and topography has encouraged the Cothi river to meander across the valley floor, forming great loops as it changes direction. The river flows towards Pontarcothi and the Towy some 11 miles (18 km.) to the south-west. The picturesque lakes at Talley are immediately to the south, almost forming the estate boundary and further south again is the Towy valley and Llandeilo. The land within the estate is either rolling parkland or wooded slopes with some lowland marsh. The ground rises from *c.* 101 m. to just over 250 m. The river separates the utilitarian buildings and estate workers dwellings from the main house. Today the house is approached off the B4337 road to the north-east; the carriage drive passes the coach house, staff homes and dairy before crossing the single span bridge to the house site.

Edwinsford is a rambling house with a complex history. The earliest section of the house, built *c.* 1635 and known at the time of building as Edwinsford Uchaf, is built on a square plan with a vast central chimney, which forms the focal point of a high pyramidal, stone clad roof. The central block, known at the time as Edwinsford Isaf and

built some thirty years after the upper house, consisted of two main rooms on each floor set about a central dog-leg staircase. There were two floors and a garret. There was apparently some re-modelling *c.* 1710 when the dormer windows were added. The lithograph by Paul Sandby published in 1776 shows a two span bridge carrying the drive to the front of the house: the house faces east-north-east. The two early blocks recorded by Sandby are shown forming an L-shaped house with a handsome pair of wrought iron gates to the front. Also to the front there is possibly a bowling green. To the north of the house is a small rectangular chapel with a simple bell tower; the chapel would have been aligned nearly east-west.

Further substantial changes were made in the middle of the nineteenth century; the large drawing ballroom to the east of the house was built in 1863 on the site of the chapel, the front and entrance porch having been re-modelled in *c.* 1842.

Francis Jones suggests that the house remained in the possession of the Wyllt (Williams) family for nineteen generations, the last of whom Sir James Hamlyn Williams Williams-Drummond died in 1970. However, in 1776 the house is described as the seat of R. Banks Hodgkinson Esq. Indeed, there is a stone plaque on the bridge over the Cothy which states 'This bridge is the sole property of the family of Edwingsford Re-built by Robert Banks Hodgkinson Esq. 1783'; possibly Banks Hodgkinson was a family member. Robert Banks Hodgkinson was uncle to Joseph Banks, later Sir Joseph Banks, who was Robert's ward from 1761 to 1764. Joseph Banks would have known something of Edwingsford as he spent some of his vacations from Oxford on the estate. He also stayed at Edwingsford again in 1767 and 1773 when he used the estate as a base for his botanical collecting in Wales. In 1773 Joseph Banks conducted Paul Sandby on his tour of Wales, so the lithograph published in 1776 would have probably originated some three years earlier.

Fenton describes Edwingsford as follows: 'An old mansion, pretty large, lying low on the banks of the Cothy, which winds under the beautifully wooded hills near it. There is a large walled garden, a great part of which is mud, said to be the best for fruit. To characterize the different farm Offices there occur several well executed figures in lead, painted, such as a large Pig near the Piggery. Haymakers near the Haggard, and at the Stables or Kennel an admirable fowler. Near the House are shown 13 large Trees planted the year Thomas Williams. Esq. of the House, was Sheriff, by him and his 12 Javelin men, after their return from the Spring Assizes; a central tree with 12 others round it. I was told that Sir Joseph Bankes (sic), who, when on a visit some 25 years ago at Edwingsford, had opened many tumuli'.

The Tithe returns of 1838 show the property as belonging to Sir James Williams, when the house and lands totalled some 569 acres. The tithe map fails to record the walled garden mentioned by Fenton, but it does, however, show a perimeter, circular, carriage ride heading south through the woods and returning in the lee of Moelfre hill from the west. Neither of the southern lodges are shown as existing at this time.

The 1906 Second Edition Ordnance Survey also shows this carriage drive, but with the addition of both lodges; the southern Iron Gate lodge, and Moelfre lodge to the west. All the major building phases have been completed, the drive now crosses the bridge to a forecourt, in which there is a large circular bed, in front of the enlarged house. An

alternative place name 'Rhydodyn' or Kilnford appears on this edition of the survey. The Allen photographs of 1871 show this bed to be planted with what appear to be fastigate yews, each in a small round bed, with the beds in a formal pattern around. In the centre is a taller conifer. It is unlikely, however, that these are the trees referred to by Fenton as they are too immature and although the photograph does not quite show all the bed, there are probably not sufficient to represent the Javelin men. In these photographs, the house is well-kept, white painted with weed-free gravel on the forecourt and creepers trained up the walls. Two venerable Scots pines are shown to the north of the house and a shrub border with yews and rhododendrons to the south; just evident is a lower lawn, but the sundial that appears on the 1906 survey is not recorded.

In recent times the estate lands have suffered a mixed history. A family rift within the Williams-Drummond family meant that the estate was left to the butler earlier this century and there have been a variety of owners since then. The photographs held in the National Monuments Record, c. 1954, show that both the house and garden are already a little in decline. The lawns to the front are now rough grass, although the box trees that now sprawl along the riverside are shown as being neatly clipped. Lloyd suggests that 'in its slow demise, (Edwinsford is) one of the saddest sights in South Wales today'. The roof and windows have now gone from the central block; the porch is collapsing and masonry is crumbling everywhere. The stone clad roof remains on the earliest, square-plan block, but the windows and large areas of rendering have gone. The lead figures mentioned by Fenton have long disappeared and now the whole structure is extremely dangerous.

At Edwinsford there is a small hamlet of estate cottages and associated outbuildings to the east of the bridge. Most of the buildings appear on the tithe survey of 1838. They are mostly of stone and have been recently restored/converted. On the roof of the dairy cottage, adjacent to the bridge, is the bell-gable with bell in place, said to have come from the former chapel.

By far the grandest cottage was the Gardener's Cottage. Immediately behind (to the north of) and attached to, the Gardener's Cottage is a most impressive gateway, standing to over 3 m. that leads into the walled garden. The doorway itself is arched; to either side are two projecting stone pillars, topped with stone balls on plinths. The space between the pillars is infilled with stone and the whole is capped with stone slabs.

The dovecote is a small square, stone roofed structure adjacent to the drive to the north-west of the Gardener's Cottage. The birds had access through the small square, stone-roofed wooden tower in the centre of the main roof. To the south side is a door to allow for collecting eggs/birds etc.

The coach house is a comparatively recent, rubble stone building with hipped slate roofs and attic gables to the south and east ends. It was remodelled after a fire at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The front section stands to two storeys with a central carriage arch, to the left (south-west) is a single storey extension. Today the entrance arch has been infilled and the whole is used as a private residence.

The elegant little single-span stone bridge is the work of the Edwards brothers, whose father was the architect of the famous Pontypridd bridge. It replaced the double-span

bridge that is shown in the aquatint by Sandby, *c.* 1776. At the southern end of the stone parapet is a carved and moulded stone which has obviously been re-used; it is this stone which Lloyd suggests is the pedestal upon which the *c.* 1710 sundial was placed.

The parkland, woodland and garden occupy undulating ground in the Cothi valley to the north of Llandeilo and Talley. Two right-angled meanders of the Cothi River are included in the estate which is bounded on the east by a minor road (B4337), to the west by an estate carriage drive, to the north by field boundaries and to the south by the B4302 road. Moelfre hill rises from *c.* 100 m. to 179 m. immediately to the south of the house; indeed some of the outbuildings and the water tank that served the house are built on to or into the slope of the hill. The north-east facing slopes of Moelfre were and still are clothed in woodland.

The lithograph by Paul Sandby (1776), shows the hillside to the south of the house as being covered in mature trees. There are further groups of trees to the north of the house and again, across the river to the east. The banks of the river are, at this time, unadorned, cattle are drinking by the bridge and to complete the picturesque scene, there is a family of ducks in the foreground.

In 1838 there was a choice of seven different routes to the house and outbuilding complex. It would seem that the main and public road to the house was, at that time, from the west. A 'dog-legged' route leads off the Talley road to the east, turns sharply north and then runs east across the parkland to the back of the house. A circular, perimeter drive meets this first drive at the eventual site of Moelfre Lodge. Of the same style and presumably contemporary with the Iron Gate Lodge, this building remains substantially unaltered. The drive, that formally ran to the front of the lodge is still just evident and a slight earthwork in the field to the west marks the original course of the perimeter drive.

The importance of both these drives diminished with the re-modelling of the house and the construction of the main gates and 'Iron Gate' lodge in 1861. The Iron Gate entrance is impressive. Set back from the road are iron entrance gates flanked by six dressed stone pillars *c.* 2 m. high, three either side of the drive. Between the outer and middle pillars, which are topped with stone balls, are low, dressed-stone walls capped with curved slabs. Above these are simple iron railings. Between the middle and inner pillars are simple iron pedestrian gates. The pillars that hold the main gates are topped with two stone lions, sitting on their haunches and holding the Edwinstow coat of arms between their forepaws.

The original Iron Gate lodge has now been extended but is a two storeyed L-shaped building with dressed stone quoins and a dressed stone string course between the ground and first floors. The window surrounds are also of dressed stone, with the windows on the ground floor being square headed; whilst those on the first floor are round headed. The date stone on the front (east) of the lodge reads 'JWD 1861'.

The route to the house from the west was abandoned and is not even shown as a path by 1906. The perimeter route became less important, although it remained as a tree lined drive, suitable for carriage rides and strolls. The rhododendron lined drive from the 'Iron Gate' lodge became one of the two main drives.

Two routes from the north-west, Abergorlech, direction are shown in *c.* 1840. These routes converge a little to the north of the dovecote. These drives were still extant in 1906 and a single track is still shown on modern maps. The entrance from the east appears to be much the same today as it was in 1838, that is as a 90° turn of the Llansawel road. At the entrance to the drive the perimeter walls curve inwards so that the two stone gate-pillars are set back from the road. The pillars are topped with stone balls on plinths. This drive passes the coach house and estate cottages and crosses the bridge to the house. Today, as in previous times, this is the main entrance, the other tracks becoming more difficult as they become overgrown.

The parkland to the west is divided into four fields and has, therefore, lost the characteristic continuous sweep of grass. The title of 1838 shows no field boundaries here; by 1906 this area appears as three fields. There are one or two oaks within the parkland fields, but these appear to be of no great age. The most ancient features would appear to be the oaks that line the B4337 and also occur along the drives and in the woodland to the south-west. Dating on one such oak that was felled in the gales put its age between 400 and 450 years, that is to the sixteenth century. All the oaks that line the road and the drive appear to be *Quercus robur*, the English oak and not *Quercus petraea* which is a native to Wales. The suggestion is, therefore, that all these ancient trees must be the result of deliberate planting.

Now moved from its setting in front of the house to a site adjacent to an estate cottage is a sundial in the form of a sandstone obelisk that stands in total to just under 1.5 m. The sundial would appear to have been made from two red sandstone blocks. The upper block, *c.* .75 m. tall, is four sided with a pyramidal top, now completely lichen covered, but apparently not originally heavily decorated. The lower, base, block, also *c.* .75 m., is square and has been heavily carved so that it projects at the top, with the carved stone forming a frame for each of the sides. There is a stepped projecting base. The whole sits on three completely circular graduated, red sandstone steps, the smallest at the top. Sadly all the brass has been removed as has the gnomon. The inscriptions, however, remain and read from top to bottom 'Watch and pray for ye knoweth neither the day or the hour'; a shield containing the initials 'MLD'; another shield beneath the site of the gnomon 'JSD 1899'; 'Do todays work today'; 'The night cometh when no man can work'. In a photograph of *c.* 1954 held at the National Monuments Record the sundial is shown in situ on the front lawn and although the print is not of the highest quality, it would appear that the gnomon was extant at that time. This is not the sundial that Lloyd suggests dates from *c.* 1710 and was by the Royal clockmaker. The sundial by the Royal clockmaker is now in two places: the elaborate brass upper part and gnomon has been acquired by the Carmarthen museum; whilst part of the stone column on which it stood is probably incorporated into the bridge at its southern end.

Around the house there was evidently once a rather charming, somewhat formal, pleasure garden that utilised the flatter land of the river terrace to the east, west and north of the house. From the front (east) of the house there would have been tranquil views across the river; whilst from the back (west) of the house, the parkland would have extended into the distance with wooded hills to either side. The formal garden to the front (north-east) of the house as photographed by Allen in 1871 seems to owe more to the Gardenesque style than the High Victorian. Creepers and climbers are on the

walls of the house and the plants in the formal circular lawn are given space to grow. A path leading south-west, presumably to a riverside walk is just visible. On the banks of the river are rhododendrons and, possibly, gunnera.

Today, the whole area has degenerated into rough grass, the small retaining wall that had prevented the river bank to the east from eroding has been tumbled and a track bulldozed down to the shale of the inside bend of the meander. The box that appears so beautifully clipped in *c.* 1954 has become unkempt and straggly. To the rear (west) of the house the picture is much the same. The iron railings that separated the park from the garden still remain, but the garden itself has given way to rough grass and tree saplings.

There is one further garden area that is somewhat enigmatic, this is the enclosed garden to the south-east of the drive prior to the bridge. Local folk believe that this area was once an ornamental lake; the land certainly lies below the level of the drive and the soil is waterlogged. However any infilling of the lake must have taken place well before 1906, when the Second Edition Ordnance Survey map show plantings of mature trees. This area is bounded on the south by a stretch of castellated, curtilage wall. Today the area is over grown with cornus and bamboo (*Sasa tessellata*).

An extensive walled kitchen garden is situated across the river to the north of the house. The area enclosed is *c.* 6.5 acres, but with various sub-divisions. The coach house, cottages and other utilitarian buildings and their garden enclosures form most of the north-west and north-eastern boundary. The main entrance is towards the north-western corner, in a stretch that is enclosed by a single wall which stands to the maximum height of some 3 m. The soil in this area is still as damp as Fenton describes it, but there are only a few pear trees remaining.

The garden would seem to have considerably more than a utilitarian function; the western part is divided from the more north-eastern section by a substantial box hedge that is now so overgrown it forms a tunnel. Beyond this dividing tunnel to the north-east are the remains of a small pleasure garden. Two small gate pillars marked the entrance to this garden, one is still in situ, the other has been broken up and moved. It would seem that this little garden comprised of a series of beds, forming a pattern and edged with box. All that remains now are somewhat overgrown box plants.

The areas of glass shown on the 1906 Second Edition Ordnance Survey against the north-western wall are still, but only just, there. The ridge to the glasshouse has survived and this is decorated with the most elegant cross and leaf finials along its length.

## **Sources**

### **Primary**

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