

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

SITE DOSSIER

SITE NAME Raglan Castle

REF. NO. PGW (Gt) 42

OS MAP 161 GRID REF. SO 414083

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

DESIGNATIONS Listed building: Raglan Castle Grade I
National Park AONB SSSI NNR ESA GAM (Mn5) SAM (Mn 5) CA

SITE EVALUATION Grade I

Primary reasons for grading

Very rare survival of outstandingly important 16th and early 17th
century garden layout: one of the most sophisticated gardens of its
day in the country

TYPE OF SITE

Formal terraced gardens, former lake and water parterre, walk with
shell niches

MAIN PHASES OF CONSTRUCTION

1550-1628

VISITED BY/DATE Elisabeth Whittle/June 1991

HOUSE

Name Raglan Castle

Grid ref SO 414083

Date/style 15th and 16th century/castle

Brief description

Raglan Castle is a large ruined castle standing on a hillock above the village of Raglan. It is a very late medieval castle, built not primarily for defence but for show: it was more of a palace than a castle. In the 16th century it was described as a 'stately castle-like house'. Built around two courts, it was begun in the second half of the 15th century by a self-made man, William ap Thomas, was continued by his son Sir William Herbert. From 1550 onwards William Somerset, 3rd Earl of Worcester, rebuilt part of the castle, adding Tudor elements such as long gallery. After his death, in 1589, there were few structural alterations to the castle, although Edward, the 4th Earl, added some peripheral elements such as the moat walk around the great tower or keep. After the surrender of the castle to the Parliamentarians in 1646, in the Civil War, it was slighted. The Somerset family never returned, taking up residence at Badminton House in Gloucestershire. The castle was steadily stripped of its fittings, and plundered for stone, until it reached its present state in this century. It is now in the Guardianship of Cadw, and its ruins are in a stable state.

THE PLEASURE GARDEN

Grid ref SO 414083

Date/style 1550-1628/terraced, formal

GENERAL DESCRIPTION, HISTORY AND LAYOUT

The gardens of Raglan Castle lie to its north-west, west and south. Most is now under turf, either mown, in the Guardianship area), or pasture. The exceptions are the Moat Walk (gravelled) and the 'Garden Plot' (gravelled and Cadw maintenance huts).

The gardens were made by the 3rd and 4th earls of Worcester, between 1550 and 1628, when the 4th earl died. They were laid out on a grand scale, and involved massive earth moving. The 3rd earl laid out the sloping ground to the north-west and south-west of the castle in a series of terraces. Below the north-west ones there was a large lake, the 'great Poole', in the valley bottom. An outer earthwork of the castle, to the south of the keep, became a curving raised bowling green. The 4th earl added the Moat Walk around the moat of the keep, summerhouses on the terraces, of which the foundations of one remain, and the formal water garden or water parterre at the head of the lake.

Apart from the present-day earthwork and stonework remains of the gardens, the main evidence for their original appearance comes from a map of 1652 by Laurence Smythe, and a description of the castle and surroundings at the time of the siege of 1646, made in 1674.

Within the castle, in the Fountain Court, is the square stone base of a fountain, called the White Horse fountain. This was in existence by 1587, when it was described in a poem called 'The Worthines of Wales' by Thomas Churchyard as running 'both day and night'.

To the north-west of the castle are three long terraces built out over the steep slope below the castle. They are retained by a huge stone revetment wall. Between them are steep high grass slopes; originally they were bounded by walls 30 feet high, according to the 1674 description. At the south-west end of the top terrace are the brick footings of a small square summerhouse, and at the north-east end of the main, central terrace, a few stone steps are visible leading up to the upper terrace. There is some evidence that there was balustrading in the garden, perhaps along the tops of the terraces; several pieces of primitive stone balustrading survive in the castle's collection of stonework.

Below the terraces the level pasture fields in the valley bottom are the site of the 'great Poole', and to the west of the terraces is its huge earthen dam, now breached by the Wilcae Brook. Towards the south-west end of the lake's area is a small elongated mound with an ancient oak tree on it, which may have been an island in the lake. At the north-east end is an embankment with a central projection, and another oak tree. Beyond this is a large boggy rectangular area of banks and ditches, which is all that remains of the water parterre. Its diamond- and triangular-shaped islands, clearly shown on the Smythe map, can still be made out on the ground.

To the south-west of the castle is a square level area with raised terraces around two sides, which is the 'garden plot' of the 1674 description. To its south, raised up on high revetment walls, is the grass bowling green, reached at the north end by stone steps. Below, reached by steps at its north-west end, is a large rectangular terrace bounded by steep scarps on its outer sides. This overlooks the valley of the Wilcae Brook below the dam. Below this is a further narrow shallow terrace. On the 1652 map the valley below is described as 'Hopyard', with an orchard on higher ground on the east slope of the valley.

Former water channels, now ditches, sometimes with water in, lead from either end of the dam to a large square earthwork at the southern end of the field. This is clearly shown on the 1652 map as a water garden, with four square islands separated by water channels. Although the water has gone, the basic structure remains, with the

islands as raised areas, and the channels as ditches between them. The date of this structure is unknown, but its simplicity makes it likely to be early, perhaps late 16th-century, and probably pre-dates the more sophisticated water parterre to the north.

The Moat Walk, made by the 4th Earl of Worcester, is a curving gravelled walk running around the outside of the moat surrounding the castle's keep (15th-century). Evenly spaced out along it are fifteen brickwork semi-circular niches. Originally they were decorated with coloured plasterwork and patterns of shells, and held statues of Roman emperors. The emperors disappeared in the Civil War, but fragments of the shellwork and coloured plasterwork survive.

STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

NW terraces

There are three long terraces on the steep slope to the NW of the castle, descending to the bottom of the Wilcae Brook valley (formerly to the edge of the lake). They are bounded by high revetment walls on the SW, NW and NE sides, with a central projection in the middle of the NW side, which is mirrored by earthwork projections in the middle of the main terrace and slightly below it. The terraces are separated by steep turf scarps (formerly walls). At the top there is a 2 m. scarp above the top terrace, which is c. 4 m. wide. Below it is a c. 5 m. scarp down to the main terrace, which is c. 8-9 m. wide. Below is a further c. 5 m. scarp down to the lowest terrace, c. 8 m. wide, bounded on the NW by the parapet (c. 0.7 m high) of the revetment wall. The terraces are reached by a grass slope (formerly steps) at the SW end, and by a doorway in the wall at the NE end of the main terrace.

The 'garden plot'

To the west of the castle, on the level of the upper terrace, is a square level area, now used for Cadw maintenance huts and hard standing. It is bounded on the NE and SE sides by a raised terrace (an extension of the highest level on the NW side of the castle) on a turf scarp c. 1.8 m. high.

The Bowling Green

To the S of the castle, above the Moat Walk, is Bowling Green. This is a curving grass platform raised up above ground level on high retaining walls. It is reached from the S entrance to the Fountain Court, by steps up from the 'garden plot', or from the open area to the SE of the castle.

The Moat Walk

This is a gravelled walk which runs round two sides of the moat of the castle's keep (the Yellow Tower of Gwent). It is bounded on the S and E by a retaining wall (on the S, of the Bowling Green), and on the N and W by the stone-revetted moat.

SW terraces

The SW terraces lie below the Bowling Green and the 'garden plot'. Immediately below a track that enters the 'garden plot' from below the Bowling Green, is a narrow terrace, backed by a 2m. high wall, and bounded on the S by a wall. It is c. 4 m. wide, with a turf scarp c. 1.8 m. high below it. On the SW side it is bounded by a 4 m. high wall at the back of the large rectangular terrace below. This terrace, now in a permanent pasture field, is bounded on the SW, SE and NW sides by an earthen scarp, overgrown with trees. On the SE it is c. 1.7 m. high, and on the other two sides c. 3.5 m. high. Below it, to the SW, is a narrower terrace bounded by a turf scarp c. 1.8 m. high. This terrace continues round the NW end of the large terrace, and continues along the SW side of the NW terraces revetment wall, enclosing two sides of a small square area which may have been part of the gardens.

The square water garden

At the S end of the field, at SO 413080, is a 16th or early 17th-century water garden, whose earthworks remain in the field. They are now turf-covered, with some trees growing on them. This was fed by water from two channels, on the E and W sides of the valley bottom. These survive as dry, or sometimes boggy ditches. The westernmost one is narrow, with a flat-topped bank on its E side. The easternmost one is wider (c. 2-3 m. wide), with a bank on its W side. In the valley bottom, between the dam, these two channels, and the water garden, are further low banks and scarps, but it would not appear that these are garden earthworks.

The water garden is a square earthwork, with the small Wilcae Brook running through the middle of it. The easternmost channel, which bounds its E side, becomes wider here (c. 11 m. wide), and has standing water in it. The area is bounded on the E, N and W by steep-sided banks c. 1-1.6 m. high. The interior is flat and divided into four quarters by wide shallow ditches (c. 4-5 m. wide, and 0.7-1.5 m. deep), and N-S by the stream. At the southern end only the western arm of the bounding ditch/channel survives.

The dam and lake

In a line with the NW terraces, to the SW of them, is the massive earthen dam of the lake. It is a wide, flat-topped embankment. c. 3-5 m. high on its steep N side. At its NE end it abuts the terraces, and at its SW end it stops at the edge of the valley. Near its E end it is cut through by the Wilcae Brook. There are no signs of any sluices. To the W is a deep cutting in its N face, a possible unsuccessful attempt to breach it in 1646.

The lake lay in the flat valley floor to the N of the dam and terraces. There was a small extension northwestwards at the western end, up a side valley which has recently been filled in and drained. The northern side of the lake is marked by the field boundary to the N of the brook, which runs through the area of the lake. The SW limit is marked by the field boundary. The NE limit is marked by the field boundary and a raised track/dam running SE-NW. In the middle of this side is a level projection which could have been some kind of viewing platform. Near the SW end of the area of the lake is a small 'island', a low oblong mound c. 21 m. long, with rounded ends, steep sides, c. 1.5 m. high, and a flat top. On it is a large oak tree.

The water parterre

At the NE end of the lake are the remains of the early 17th-century water parterre. They consist of a rectangular area, stretching the width of the former lake, of boggy channels, mounds and banks. Most of this is under permanent pasture, but the NW end is in another field, partly planted with conifers. Around the area are linear banks up to 1 m. high. Within it diamond-shaped and triangular 'islands' can be made out as mounds of a similar height, with narrow boggy channels between them.

Other areas

Aerial photographs have shown up a further possible area of gardens or orchards to the NNE of the castle, on the slope above and to the E of the water parterre. These show a rectangular area subdivided into rectangular or square divisions. However, very little is visible on the ground.

BUILT COMPONENTS

Walls

The ragged tops of the revetment walls of the terracing, both on the NW and SW sides of the castle, suggest that they were originally higher, although probably not much higher. They project slightly above the levels of the terraces. At the NE end of the NW terraces is an

upstanding wall, not standing to its full height, with a doorway in it to the main, middle terrace. There is a wall at the SE end of the narrow terrace above the main terrace on the SW side of the castle.

Summerhouse

At the SW end of the top terrace on the NW side of the castle stand the footings of a small roughly square brick summerhouse. This measures c. 6.1 x 6.6 m. The footings are c. 0.4 m. high on the inside and 0.7 m. high on the outside of the NW side.

Moat Walk

The Moat Walk is bounded on its outer side by a high stone revetment wall (of the Bowling Green). There is a wide blocked archway at its eastern corner, which led under the Bowling Green. In this wall are fifteen brick semi-circular niches c 3 m. high, 1.6 m. wide and 0.6 m. deep. In some of them patterns of coloured plasterwork and shells can still be made out. The best preserved ones are those at each end.

Steps

A few of the many steps mentioned in the 1674 description are visible. Others may still exist beneath the turf. At the NE end of the main terrace a few stone steps are exposed leading up to the upper terrace. There is a flight of stone steps leading down from the W end of the Bowling Green to the 'garden plot', and a further flight, this time of curving steps, in the north corner of the main SW terrace, leading down to it from the grass slope (formerly steps) below the summerhouse.

The White Horse fountain

All that remains of this fountain, situated in the middle of the Fountain Court of the castle, is a square stone plinth.

Balustrading

In the collection of odd bits of stonework on the green to the E of the castle is some primitive balustrading. It is very plain, with straight-sided uprights with faint moulding in rectangular panels. The tops are arched. It is presumed that this came from the tops of the terraces.

ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENTS

None

PLANTED COMPONENTS

Most of the gardens are now under turf. That in the Guardianship area is mown, except for the bottom terrace. Beyond, the gardens are under permanent pasture, grazed by sheep and cows. Some areas have seedling trees, such as the banks of the Wilcae Brook, the square water garden and the water parterre. There are a few old oak trees in the valley bottom, in particular one on the 'island' in the lake, and one on the platform at the NE end of the lake.

Reconstructions of original planted features

None

Special collections of garden plants

None

Documented living plants

None

Other (including elements of nature conservation interest)

None

ESSENTIAL SETTING AND VIEWS BEYOND THE SITE

Essential setting: farmland to the W and N of the gardens

ANY SPECIAL FEATURES

None

SURVIVAL OF INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS

Structural components: Most

Built components: Some

Architectural ornaments: None

Planted components: None

SOURCES

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

Primary

Laurence Smythe map of Raglan Castle, 1652 (National Library of Wales)
Anon, Description of Raglan Castle, 1674 (Muniment Room, Badminton
House: 403.1.1)

Secondary

A.J. Taylor, Raglan Castle (1950), Welsh Office Official Handbook
J.R. Kenyon, Raglan Castle (1988), Cadw Guidebook
H. Durant, The Somerset Sequence (1976)
J. Bradney, A History of Monmouthshire II, part 1 (1911)
T. Churchyard, The Worthines of Wales (1587)
C. Heath, Account of Raglan Castle (1819)
E. Whittle, 'The Renaissance Gardens of Raglan Castle', Garden History
17.1 (1989), pp. 83-94.
E. Whittle, 'The Sixteenth and Seventeenth century gardens at Raglan
Castle', The Monmouthshire Antiquary VI (1990), pp. 69-75.

Aerial photographs

Cambridge University 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.
