

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

SITE DOSSIER

SITE NAME Kemeys House

REF. NO. PGW (Gt) 50

OS MAP 171 GRID REF. ST 383926

FORMER COUNTY Gwent UNITARY AUTHORITY Newport B.C. COMMUNITY
COUNCIL Kemeys Inferior

DESIGNATIONS Listed building: Kemeys House (grade II*); barn
belonging to Kemeys House (grade II)

National Park AONB SSSI NNR ESA GAM SAM CA

SITE EVALUATION Grade II

Primary reasons for grading

Walls and terracing of Tudor garden survive, with little subsequent
alteration

TYPE OF SITE

Terraced garden

MAIN PHASES OF CONSTRUCTION

16th century

VISITED BY/DATE Elisabeth Whittle/January 1992

HOUSE

Name Kemeys House

Grid ref ST 383926

Date/style 16th century/Tudor

Brief description:

Kemeys House is situated on the eastern edge of the Usk valley, on a steep slope above the river. A public road originally ran along the valley just above the house, to the south-east, and access was originally from this side. When the road was moved to the north-west of the house, below it, access was via a drive to the north (now cut off from the house). A new drive has now been made to the north-west of the house.

The house was built in the 16th century, and there is a date of 1597 on the large stone barn to the north of it. It is a substantial stone house in Tudor style, with several phases of development. The main entrance and forecourt were originally on the south-east side, but are now on the north-west side, where a path leads across the garden to a two-storey porch.

Until 1700 the house belonged to the Kemeys family. George Kemeys sold it in 1700 to Laurence Lord, and went to live at Cefn Tilla. At the end of the 18th century it was left to the Revd Holford Cotton.

OUTBUILDINGS

Name Barn

Grid ref ST 383926

Date/style, and brief description
1597/Tudor.

To the north of the house is a large stone barn with the date 1597 over the main doorway. It is a handsome, symmetrical building, and is so positioned as to close the axis of the garden terrace to the north-west of the house.

To the north of the barn are further farm outbuildings, some of which may be contemporary with the barn.

THE PLEASURE GARDEN

Grid ref St 383926

Date/style 16th century/terraced

GENERAL DESCRIPTION, HISTORY AND LAYOUT

The garden of Kemeys House lies to the north-west and south-west of the house. Its integration with the house and barn dated 1597 suggests that it is 16th-century in date, contemporary with the house and outbuildings. To the south-east of the house is a small, partly paved walled court which was originally the forecourt. There is cobbling beneath the grass. The entrance to it was on the north-east side (now blocked). From this court there is a doorway through the south-west wall into the terraced garden. This lies to the south-west and north-west of the house. There are two levels. The higher terrace lies to the south-west of the house. It is roughly square, backed on the south-east side by a wall. At its southern end the terrace narrows and below it is a rough grass bank. The terrace is bounded on its north-west side by a steep grass scarp c. 1.3 m. high, below which is the lower terrace. This runs the full length of the garden, from the wall which bounds the south-west side, to a revetment wall at the northern end, which runs north-west from the north corner of the house. Just to the north of this is the barn, which is symmetrically placed at right-angles to the axis of the terrace. This is a narrower terrace, reached on the north-west by stone steps up to a flagstone path to the present front door of the house. The terrace is built up over the steep slope, and is revetted on its north-west side by a substantial stone wall. Both terraces are largely grassed over, and some modern features have been added to the lower terrace (walling, steps, a small pond, and a low bank with revetment wall).

Below the terraces the ground slopes steeply down to the road, and there is no sign of terracing. This area was formerly (in the 19th century, and probably later) an orchard, and there is every reason to suppose that it was originally an orchard. The enclosing wall on the south-west side continues most of the way down to the road. A small stream that is culverted under the terraces emerges below the wall, and is channelled into two small ponds, one above the other. Their date is uncertain, but the stonework and culvert in the upper dam appear to be of some antiquity. The area is now rough grass with a few trees. The present, modern drive winds up from the road at the northern end of this area.

The A449 dual carriageway now runs up the valley immediately below the house, between the Caerleon road and the river, cutting the house off from the site of All Saints church, next to the river. Bradney, in *A History of Monmouthshire*, mentions a stone path from the house down to the church, but there is now no sign of this.

STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

The former forecourt lies to the south-east of the house. It is a small area enclosed by walls. Next to the house is a lower paved area. The rest of the area is on a slightly higher level, with a cobbled surface beneath the grass.

The upper terrace lies to the south-west of the house. This is a roughly square area with a low scarp on its south-east side up to the enclosing wall. On its north-west side is a steep grass scarp c. 1.3 m. high, below which is the lower terrace.

The lower terrace runs from a revetment wall at the north end of the house to the wall at the south-west end of the garden. It is narrower than the upper terrace. At its northern end is a stone revetment wall up to 3 m. high, which protrudes as a low parapet wall c. 0.5 m. high topped by stone flags. Along the north-west side the terrace is

bounded by a revetment wall c. 2-3.5 m. in height, which protrudes as a low parapet wall up to 1 m. high (maximum). Below this wall a narrow, roughly levelled grass walk runs the length of the wall, with a concrete block path along its northern end, leading to steps up the wall which lead to a flagstone path across the terrace to the porch/front door of the house.

Parallel with the revetment wall, to the west of the house, a low bank has been built in the second half of the 20th century, and this is at present being given a revetment wall on its north-west edge. A small pond is also being made on the central axis of the terrace, at the southern end of the bank.

A small stream is culverted under the terraces, emerging in a narrow stone-lined channel from under the bank at the southern end of the upper terrace, before continuing underground. It runs out at the foot of the revetment wall of the lower terrace, where it is channelled into two small ponds, one above the other. The upper pond is partly lined with stone and concrete, and is edged with flagstones. The water is led in a narrow stone culvert under the dam into the next pond, which is dammed with concrete blocks.

BUILT COMPONENTS

The forecourt is bounded on its north-east, south-east and south-west sides by stone walls. On the north-east side is a blocked entrance and a short stretch of wall next to the house with a Tudor doorway in it. The wall on the south-east side is c. 3 m. high, standing to its full height. The wall on the south-west side is 3-3.5 m. high, also standing to its full height. At the lower ground level is an arched doorway through into the garden, and at the higher level a traceried window from the demolished All Saints church, which was situated below the house, next to the river, has been inserted (second half of 20th century). There are stone steps up from the lower flagged area next to the house to the upper level.

The upper terrace is backed on its south-east side by a wall c. 3.5 m. high (maximum). Towards the southern end of the garden the wall is lower and is collapsing in places. The former public road runs along the garden boundary outside this wall. The south-west boundary wall of the garden is up to 2.5 m. high, and is also crumbling in places. In the east corner are remnants of a former outside lavatory. In the north corner of the terrace narrow curving stone steps have been built (second half of 20th century), possibly using materials from the demolished church (moulded stonework etc.), which lead down to the lower terrace in front of the north-west side of the house.

The revetment wall of the lower terrace protrudes above the ground level as a low parapet wall, c. 0.5 m. high at the northern end, and up to 1 m. high (of uneven height, and not standing to its full height) at its southern end. Towards its northern end nine stone steps with a low parapet of stone flags lead up the outside of the wall to a doorway in a short higher stretch of the wall, which leads into the garden (lower terrace). The doorway has a flat lintel on the outside and an arched one on the inside, and in it is a simple iron gate. To the south of the doorway a short stretch of walling, the same height as over the doorway, runs at right-angles to the revetment wall (on to which it is butted) for c. 1.5 m. At its foot is a low stone bench. Wide stone steps flanked by low parapet walls (repointed, and northern one probably rebuilt) lead up to the porch from the flagstone path between the doorway and the house.

Half way along the terrace, at the southern end of the house, two stone walls c. 1.2 m. high have been built out at right-angles to the main axis, leaving a gap in the middle. These are of the second half of the 20th century, and like the steps at their eastern end, may have been built using stone from All Saints church (more moulded stonework).

The south-west wall of the garden continues down the slope below the lower terrace, although here it is in poor condition, and is only c. 1 m. high. It tapers out near the bottom of the garden.

ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENTS

In the former forecourt, next to the house, is an area of flagstone paving.

PLANTED COMPONENTS

The terraces and former forecourt are largely grassed over. The sloping area below (former orchard) is rough grass, with a few trees and shrubs. At its northern end, where the modern drive winds up the hill, is an area of specimen shrubs and lawn. All planting is modern.

Reconstructions of original planted features
None

Special collections of garden plants
None

Documented living plants
None

Other (including elements of nature conservation interest)
None known

ESSENTIAL SETTING AND VIEWS BEYOND THE SITE

Essential setting: farmland (permanent pasture) to north, east and south of garden; barn to north.

Views: north-west from house and terraces across the Usk valley (A on map).

ANY SPECIAL FEATURES
None

SURVIVAL OF INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS

Structural components: most
Built components: most
Architectural ornaments: few (few known)
Planted components: none

SOURCES

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

Secondary

J. Bradney, A History of Monmouthshire Vol III, pt. II (1923).

To be appended: 1:10,000 map of site, marked with boundaries, viewpoints etc.; colour photographs of site, photocopies of relevant material, where available.

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