

STOUTHALL

Ref number	PGW (Gm) 57 (SWA)
OS Map	159
Grid ref	SS 4747 8926
Former county	West Glamorgan
Unitary authority	City and County of Swansea
Community council	Reynoldston
Designations	Listed building: Stouthall Grade II
Site evaluation	Grade II

Primary reasons for grading An unpretentious late Georgian villa residence with unremarkable small park and wooded pleasure grounds, but with an unusual sunken area of exposed stone, incorporated into the grounds with paths and planting. It included a natural cave that was ornamented as a garden feature. The grounds also contain an unusually well preserved ice-house.

Type of site Small landscape park; wooded pleasure grounds with cave; walled kitchen garden

Main Phases of Construction 1787-90; 1843-1903

Site description

Stouthall is a substantial but rather stark late Georgian house set in pleasure grounds and a very small park. It is situated on level ground to the south-west of the village of Reynoldston, in Gower. The house is a tall, symmetrical, three-storey building of rendered local stone, with sash windows and a shallow hipped roof. It is approached by a straight drive from the south, which sweeps around the east side to the main entrance front on the north. This has a classical entrance porch of four Doric columns, flanked by single-storey projecting modern additions. The south front has a central full-height bow. On the east side two single-storey wings added in the early nineteenth century form the north and south sides of a small service court, which is closed at the east end by stone walls and widely set square gate piers with pyramidal tops, the north one higher than the south.

Stouthall was built for John Lucas the younger (1759-1831) by the Swansea architect William Jernegan in 1787-90. It replaced an earlier house, which stood to the south-west of the present house, in which members of the Lucas family had lived since at least the sixteenth century. Its severe neo-classical style is reminiscent of that of nearby Penrice, built shortly before for Thomas Mansel Talbot by Anthony Keck. John Lucas was something of an amateur botanist. He lived in Bath, but moved in 1784 to Peartree (now Fairyhill), nearby. He had moved into Stouthall by 1793. John

Lucas's son, Colonel J. Nicholas Lucas (1784-1863), was the last in the male line of the family; the property passed to Colonel Edward R. Wood (1819-76), High Sheriff in 1861, who married Colonel Lucas's daughter Mary (1822-1903) in 1843. They moved into the house on their marriage. Colonel Wood was a keen amateur archaeologist, who undertook excavations in some Gower caves. Stouthall was eventually sold to the Morgan family, with whom it remains, in 1920. It was rented out, first as a school and then as a hospital. In 1939 soldiers were billeted here; in 1942 it was used as a maternity hospital; in the 1960s it was a convalescent home, and in 1974 it became a field study centre for the London borough of Merton.

The ruined coachhouse and stables building lies to the north-east of the house, on the north-west corner of the walled kitchen garden. It is roofless, of mortared rubble stone construction, with brick facings to the openings. There is a tall, wide entrance on the west side, over which the wall is castellated, with a central square recess for a heraldic panel. Half of this, featuring a deer's head, is now in the house, and the whole is thought to have come originally from Great House, Cheriton. The central recess is flanked by quatrefoil ones. The archway has high walls on either side, with a cross-shaped recess on the south side. The wall to the north is higher, with a brick course near the top. The north side of the coachhouse is broken down in the middle and has a chimney at its east end. Out from the east side, which is the wall of the kitchen garden, is a parallel wall with three wide, shallow arches separated by brick piers. These lead to two compartments, the south one being double. Near the south end of the east wall is an enigmatic low opening with a stone lintel. At the south end is a window opening and an entrance into a large roofless brick barn, to the south of the coachhouse. This is a tall building, set against the west wall of the kitchen garden. It has gables, doors and windows at the north and south ends. The interior is overgrown.

The 1920 Sale Particulars mention stabling for seven horses, presumably in the arched compartments. The buildings fell into disrepair after the 1920 sale.

There is a minimal amount of parkland at Stouthall, and what there is is very plain. The park consists of a four-sided field to the north of the house, bounded on its outer sides by a thin and discontinuous belt of beech trees. The only features in it are an isolated oak and a standing stone, thought to have been placed there by Colonel Wood. The park is separated from the forecourt by a low scarp and modern wire fence, with the original iron fencing at the west end.

The park is probably contemporary with the house, dating from the 1790s. The 1878 Ordnance Survey map suggests that it was originally larger, encompassing the large fields to the north-east and west of the present park, and that it had more trees. Field boundaries were probably removed to form the three large fields, but there appears to have been little other landscaping apart from the planting of beeches along the perimeter.

The pleasure grounds lie to the south and east of the house, bounded on the south by the A4118 road, on the west and north by field and park fencing and on the east by the Reynoldston road and property boundaries. The house lies at the western end of the grounds. The main entrance, off the A4118, is to its south. It is set back from the road, flanked by curving rubble stone walls and low, square piers of rusticated stone with dressed stone corners. That on the west has a flat dressed stone top; that on the east is damaged and its top is missing. Between them are modern wooden field gates. The tarmacked drive runs northwards, flanked by the wooded grounds on the east and by a belt of scrubby woodland on the boundary to the west

and then by an open lawn in front of the house. The deciduous woodland has two clumps of beech and a large oak within it. The drive runs past the service court to a small tarmacked forecourt on the north front of the house. At its north end a secondary drive branches eastwards and runs along the north edge of the grounds. Where a small stream enters the grounds from the north the drive is built up and revetted with a stone wall, now somewhat ruinous. The entrance, now little used, at the east end of the drive, is on the Reynoldston lane. This is flanked by tall, square, dressed stone piers with moulded splayed tops. The north one is topped by a large ball finial.

To the east of the drive the grounds are wooded. They can be loosely divided into two halves: the southern end, to the south of the walled kitchen garden, and the northern half, to its west. The southern half has informal grass walks cut through it. There are not many mature trees left, most of the area being dominated by young seedling sycamore and ash. Towering above these are a few gaunt beech trees and a large pine near the boundary. A large wellingtonia was felled in summer 1996. Ornamental tree planting in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries appears to have been largely of beech, but most of these have now gone. Some replanting has been undertaken in the mid 1990s. To the south of the main east-west walk, near the felled wellingtonia, is a large conglomerate standing stone, *c.* 2.5 m high. This was probably placed here by Colonel Wood as a 'folly'. At the northern end, near the south wall of the kitchen garden, is a ruinous, overgrown oval structure bounded by stone walls up to 1 m high. Its interior is lower than ground level, suggesting a pool, but there is no sign of water here now. The west side is broken down, with a lot of fallen stone scattered on the ground, and to the west is an area of rockwork. To the east of the kitchen garden is a strip of mixed woodland consisting of seedling trees, young oak, beech, hazel and some mature beech.

The second area, to the west of the kitchen garden, is rather different in character, being a sunken area of natural rock, some probably quarried, some natural holes, cliffs and caves. The ground drops steeply from the drive and the first feature, on the western edge, is a very well preserved ice-house. A flight of stone steps leads down to a dog-leg passage, flanked by high rubble stone walls, which leads to the ice-house at its southern end. This is a semi-subterranean, brick-lined, egg-shaped chamber encased in a square stone outer wall, with a brick arched entrance. It has a domed roof, restored in the 1990s with cement.

Steep 'paths' hewn from the rock lead down from the ice-house to a cave. This has a tall narrow entrance with a rock arch over it, possibly contrived. Its top is now open, but it is said that it was once roofed over in stained glass. The far end, now blocked with a mound of hospital rubbish, was originally open. The interior is very wet but has no visible ornamentation. Side holes are dead ends. The rock area continues to the north, with overgrown paths leading to an 'amphitheatre' with rock faces around it; to an alcove cut out of the rock, through rocks to a sunken passageway to another 'amphitheatre' planted around with yews. The whole area is planted with yew trees, giving a slightly gloomy atmosphere, and the dampness and shade have encouraged ferns. Immediately west of the northern end of the kitchen garden is an area of large mature beech trees.

The last remaining area of the pleasure grounds is that at the east end of the secondary drive. The area to the south of the drive is wooded, dominated by a group of large beeches. In them is a small pond, with a winding channel below it which peters out.

The grounds were probably initially laid out for John Lucas the younger, at the same time as the house was built in 1787-90. Lucas is known to have been a keen botanist and is likely to have taken an interest in his grounds. The 1920 Sale Particulars mention pleasure grounds 'of limited extent and inexpensive to maintain'. They included a tennis lawn, Ladies' Garden and shrubberies. The tennis lawn was presumably to the south of the house, the Ladies' Garden adjacent to the house and the shrubberies to the east. The embellishment of the rocky area, including the cave, was probably undertaken by Colonel Wood and his wife Mary in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The walled kitchen garden lies to the east of the house, surrounded by the wooded pleasure grounds. It is a walled rectangular garden, elongated north-south and divided east-west into two unequal compartments, the northern one being smaller. The north wall is of rubble stone construction, *c.* 3.5 m high, with slate coping. The east wall is of rubble stone construction, *c.* 2.7-3.5 m high, with a gap towards the north end. On the inside it is brick lined. The west wall is similar. The south wall is *c.* 2.7 m high, but built on the outside with a stone base above which the wall is faced with bricks. These have fallen away in places, revealing the stone and loose packing behind. The interior of the wall is of rubble stone construction, without brick facing. Parts of the stone facing have fallen away, revealing the loose packing inside. In the middle is a doorway with brick facing. The wall extends eastwards beyond the kitchen garden and in it is an entrance. Its sides have lost their facing but they are topped with large dressed stone slabs, now somewhat ruinous and overgrown, with a shallow frieze at their base. Clearly, this was originally a highly ornamented doorway between two parts of the pleasure grounds. The west wall is the same height as the others, built of stone and brick lined on the inside. Next to a modern brick hut set against the wall is a brick faced arched entrance.

The north compartment is mostly overgrown with brambles, with grass paths cut through them. On the north side is an entrance with a brick-faced arch. Against the outside are the remains of an outbuilding, consisting of low, ruinous stone walls. In the north-east corner is a ruinous stone and brick building. Its walls stand to their full height, with gables at the east and west ends, and the west half is roofed. The west wall has a door and square windows. The wall between the compartments is of rubble stone, *c.* 3 m high, faced with brick on the south side, with an arched doorway opposite that in the north wall. Its arch is faced with stone on the north and brick on the south. The south half of the south compartment has been cleared and its western half is being used as a tree nursery. The walled garden is probably contemporary with the house, dating to the early 1790s. The 1920 Sale Particulars mention a lean-to vinery 65 ft long, in two divisions, a potting ground and an orchard adjoining.

Sources

Primary

Estate map by John Williams for Thomas Mansel Talbot, 1784: Glamorgan Record Office, DD/P 820.
1920 Sale Particulars.

Secondary

Lucas, R.L.T., 'The Lucas family of Stouthall', *Gower* XXIII (1972), pp. 51-53.

Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales, *Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Glamorgan*, IV (1981), pp, 303-10.
Gwynn, D. and P. Muxworthy, *A pictorial journey through Edwardian Gower* (1989), no. 49.
Gwynn, D. and P. Muxworthy, *Edwardian Gower revisited* (1994), pp. 80, 81.
Newman, J., *The buildings of Wales. Glamorgan* (1995), pp, 540-41.