

UPTON CASTLE

Ref number	PGW (Dy) 45 PEM
OS map	158
Grid ref	SN 0205 0468
Former county	Dyfed
Local authority	Pembrokeshire
Community council	Upton
Designations	Pembrokeshire Coast National Park
Site evaluation	Grade II

Primary reasons for grading

A fine plantsman's garden and arboretum in a highly picturesque location, with varied and interesting plantings of a wide range of hardy and half-hardy trees, shrubs and herbaceous species, dating mainly to the 1920s.

Type of site

Formal garden; informal garden; arboretum

Main phases of construction

Mostly created in 1927

Site description

Upton Castle is situated above the south bank of the Carew river as it broadens out to join the Cresswell and Daugleddau rivers. The waters from these three rivers surround the low-lying peninsular upon which Cosheston and Upton were built. Upton castle is about 50 metres AOD with the gently sloping land being mostly north to north-east facing.

Jones and others state that the castle was the home of the Maliphant family (also spelt Maliphaunt, Malefant and Malyfant). In the chapel are three tombstones; one effigy shows a warrior with sword and shield the other has his hands clasped together in prayer and his feet resting upon a dog, the symbol of fidelity. The third effigy, a woman, is thought to be the wife of William Maliphant. These effigies are said to be original to the site.

Through the female line, Upton Castle passed to the Bowen family from Carmarthen. When the last Bowen in the main line of descent, Morris, died in 1758, the estate was left to his four daughters. Eventually the estate was bought by a nabob, Captain John Tasker. He died young and without heir in 1800 and the castle passed to his niece Maria, who was married to the Reverend William Evans. The property stayed with

the family until 1927 when it was sold to Mr Stanley Neale. Mrs Joyce Skelton (nee Neale) and her husband, formerly Canon of Lincoln Cathedral, now live in and own the property.

Lewis, writing in 1833, suggests that the parish 'was formerly distinguished for its ancient castle, which, if not originally built, was anciently occupied by the family Maliphant from whom it passed by marriage to that of Bowen. The castle and its dependencies was subsequently purchased by Mr Tasker, who devised his estates among his three nieces, one of whom, by marriage, conveyed that castle and portion of this property to the Reverend William Evans, who is now owner of the parish. The remains of the ancient castle have been incorporated in the building of the present mansion: they consist principally of the entrance gateway and two circular bastions by which it was defended; one of these forms a projecting window in one of the apartments. The present seat occupies a charming situation and commands beautiful and picturesque views of the converging estuaries which unite to form this branch of the haven'.

An early illustration of about 1800, shows the three round towers of the gatehouse and an addition of an imposing three storey wing to the south-south-east. Beyond this, again to the east, is a further two storey building which must have been adjacent to the small church, still extant, which is again to the east of the main block. The Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments in Wales has visited the castle on several occasions. The report of 1922 suggests that the castle may have been similar to Picton and that it could have been built by the same craftsmen. However, in his revision of 1977, A. J. Parkinson suggests in his introduction that it was a medieval tower-house, to which have been added later wings in at least four phases of building. Whatever its antecedents, Upton Castle remains an intriguing private home, still dominated by the three semi-circular towers at its entrance.

The farm complex is set apart from the house to the west and is not included within the registered area. There are no additional buildings within the area except for the small church.

On the terrace to the east of the main structure of the house and adjacent to the walled garden, the church is referred to as a chapel on modern maps. However, it was probably once the parish church for Nash-cum-Upton. The Ordnance Survey First Edition 6 inch map of about 1875 records a church, cross and, in parenthesis, a Rectory on the site. The church, which is dedicated to St. Giles, is a one and a half-storey stone building with a bell above the west gable. The pitched roof is slated and most of the window and door openings are arched. Within, the building has plain-washed walls and oak pews. The ebullience of the carved stone associated with the 'Maliphant Tomb', which is an effigy of a praying warrior, is in marked contrast. Other memorials in the church include those to Morris Bowen (1758), John Tasker (1800) and Thomas Woods (1801). Laws (1888, 1995 reprint) includes a sketch of the Norman font and later mentions a curious stone taper holder in the shape of a fist.

Outside, just to the west of the main door, is a simple medieval stone preaching cross some 1.7m high. The cross is set on a platform, which is reached by two steps on the southern side.

There were two approaches to the castle, the main drive from the south and a subsidiary one from the home farm to the north. Today, regular traffic is restricted to the main drive. The tarmac drive runs almost due north from Upton Lodge to the castle. At

the entrance to the drive are two fine gate piers which stand, with ball finial, to about 2m. To the immediate west of the entrance is the lodge, whilst to the east is a castellated stone wall about 1.5m high. The drive is nearly 550m long. To either side the mown grass is planted with shrubs and trees (some of considerable age) and beyond the trees, again to both sides, are field banks, which may be ancient. At SN 0195 0446 the drive forks. The route to the west leads to the home farm and the main drive leads to the castle through fine gate piers identical to those at the main entrance. At the castle, the drive sweeps around to form a forecourt, with a semicircular water feature to the west.

The gardens associated with Upton Castle occupy a gentle east-facing valley which runs down to the Carew river. The nearest settlement is Cosheston, which is about a mile to the south-west. The whole area now is one of settled cultivation, with the ancient conflicts which brought about the building of Upton, Picton and the like, seeming remote. The community of Upton is reported to be the smallest parish in Wales and consists of the former area of parkland, the castle, home farm and buildings associated with the estate. The title map for Cosheston parish shows the roads from Cosheston heading towards Upton and, once across the boundary, they are noted as private. Upton, it would seem, was very much an entity in itself, having access to everything necessary to sustain the household economy, as described by Laws.

Although the site is of ancient origins, most of the gardens appear to have been created in the last hundred and fifty years or so. The walled garden to the east and the small pond by the drive to the west were extant in about 1875 but most of the plantings are more recent.

The registered area extends from Upton Lodge and tree-lined drive to the north of the castle and includes the plantings and landscaped areas to the east and south of the castle. The plantings to the south utilise a small sheltered valley, with the whole area being semi-formal. The plantings and landscaping near the house are more structured and formal. Although some of the trees may pre-date the arrival of the Neale family in 1927, most of the plantings seem to be as a result of their work.

There are three main areas to the gardens, each different in character. These are the dell, the arboretum and lawns and the terraces.

The dell has been created within a diminutive valley to the south of the castle. The small stream which winds its way through the valley is crossed by two small stone bridges. The southern bridge has a simple curved stone arch beneath, whilst the upper or northern bridge has a pointed, gothic arch. Both of these decorative bridges carry paths, rather than trackways, over the stream. Informal paths meander through the area to take the visitor, now as when it was created, passed exotic trees and shrubs. The plantings within the dell incorporate some fine examples of rhododendrons, including *R. falconeri*, *R. arboreum*, *R. austinii*, *R. 'Cynthia'*, *R. davidsonianum*, *R. yunnanense*, *R. macabeum*, *R. 'Loderi'*, *R. calophyllum*, *R. Tompsonii*, *R. argyrophyllum*, *R. Ivery's scarlet* and several Exbury hybrids.

In addition, there is a good range of other unusual trees and shrubs, these include *Abies procera*, *Sequoia sempervirens*, *viburnum plicatum 'Mariesii'*, *Eucryphia glutinosa*, *Sciadopity verticillata*, *Betula papyrifera*, *Pinus pinaster*, *Acer palmatum*, *Cornus kousa*, *Magnolia campbellii*, *Quercus castanifolia*, *Rogersia podophylla*, *Cephalotaxus fortunei*, *Magnolia delavayi*, *Magnolia kobus* and *Magnolia obovata*.

Throughout this area are also what would appear to be a good variety of hydrangeas. To the east of the dell is an open lawn area adjacent to the arboretum.

The lawn and arboretum area slopes gently more or less from north to south. At the lower, southern boundary are two magnificent weeping beeches, which frame an impressive patch of gunnera. Elsewhere, *Liriodendron*, *Acer griseum*, *Magnolia campbellii* (planted in 1937), *Davidia involucrata*, *Pinus radiata*, *Ginkgo biloba*, *Eucalyptus gunnii*, a very large *Catalpa*, *Quercus ilex* 'Latifolia', *Cryptomeria japonica* 'Elegans' appear, as well as cupressus and sequoiadendrons. To the north of this area are the terraces.

The terraces at Upton do not seem to appear on the 1875 Ordnance Survey map, although there is a boundary wall where the retaining wall now stands. At the end of the nineteenth century, a row of deciduous, mature trees is recorded.

Below the house, with its formal lawns, is a series of three terraces, which run from east to west. The first terrace is mainly planted with hardy plants such as yew and holly, which are clipped in a formal style. The second terrace also has a formal feel, with four rose beds surrounding a central sundial. Between these two terraces is a stone-built summerhouse through which a path leads towards the church. The path to the church runs along the inner western wall of the walled garden. Over the path is a pergola, which supports laburnums. The third terrace is mainly given over to a swimming pool, although there is a large *Drimys* and a *Parrotia persica*. From this terrace there is a path which leads towards 'Lover's Lane' which is a path alongside the estuary.

This path is shown on the 1875 survey, although it ends at Upton Cottage, to the east of the castle. Today, as then, the path meanders through woodland, now invaded with laurel and *R. ponticum*. To the south of the path runs a small stream. At SN 0240 0474, just before Upton Cottage, is a series of low earthworks, which have been constructed across the valley floor. These may be the field boundaries shown on the early survey. However, the land here is very wet and the earthworks do seem to slow the flow of water. It is very tempting to suggest, therefore, that they were dams to retain the water for fishponds and that they had become disused by the time of the 1875 survey.

To the east of the small chapel is the walled garden which measures, approximately, 80m x 60m, with brick lined walls which stand, for the most part, 2 – 2.5m high. The early survey of about 1875 clearly shows the garden much as it is today, almost rectangular in shape but with the southern wall being extended to the west. This survey also shows a perimeter path, three north – south paths which are crossed by one path from east – west. No structures appear within, although thirteen randomly planted deciduous trees are shown.

Today, the garden appears to be little changed although there is a range of modern glasshouses against the northern wall. The internal layout has gone and much of the garden is down to grass, although there are formal rectangular beds for flowers and soft fruit.

Sources

Primary

Parkinson AJ, Royal Commission site visit notes, held in the National Monuments Record, (1977), Aberystwyth. Also notes of the 1922 *Inventory* visit.

Secondary

Jones F, *Historic houses of Pembrokeshire and their families*, (1996), p 220

Laws E, *The history of little England beyond Wales*, (1888, 1995 reprint), pp385 & 393.

Lewis S, *Topographical dictionary*, (1833), vol II, (Upton).