

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

SITE DOSSIER

SITE NAME Hilston Park

REF. NO. PGW (Gt) 22

OS MAP 161 GRID REF. SO 446187

FORMER COUNTY Gwent UNITARY AUTHORITY Monmouth B.C. COMMUNITY
COUNCIL Llangattock-vibon-avel

DESIGNATIONS Listed building: Hilston House Grade II
National Park AONB SSSI NNR ESA GAM SAM CA

SITE EVALUATION Grade II

Primary reasons for grading

19th-century park and garden, with some well preserved features,
including ornamental lake and folly tower.

TYPE OF SITE

19th-century landscape park, pleasure grounds and garden; 19th-century
walled kitchen garden, ice-house

MAIN PHASES OF CONSTRUCTION

c. 1840 onwards

VISITED BY/DATE Elisabeth Whittle/December 1990

HOUSE

Name Hilston House

Grid ref SO 446187

Date/style c. 1840/neo-classical

Brief description

Hilston House stands on the top of a ridge to the west of the Monnow valley. There has been a house on the site since at least the 17th century. During the 17th and 18th centuries it was owned by the Needham family. In 1838 the house was burnt down and the next owner, Mr. Cave built the present one, which is a large neo-classical, two-storey building. The main front is on the NW, where there is a two-storey portico in the centre. The SE front has a single-storey portico running the length of the front, leading to a conservatory at the NE end. The E wing of the house was added in the early 1900s.

OUTBUILDINGS

Name Coach-house

Grid ref SO 445188

Date/style, and brief description

The coach-house stands on the NE side of the drive, between the drive and the Home Farm. All that remains of it are the back and side walls. The rest was pulled down in 1972.

THE PARK

Central grid ref SO 450185

Date/style

mid 19th century/landscape

General description, history, and layout

The park was made at the same time as the house was rebuilt, c. 1840, by Mr. Cave. At the beginning of the 20th century his plantations were 'now just coming to their prime' (Bradney). It is a small, modest landscape park on rolling ground sloping to the south, to the west of the Monnow valley. Its chief ornamental features are the plantations, and it is now largely in agricultural use. The house stands on the highest part of the park and from it and the garden most of the park can be seen (facilitated by a ha-ha on the edge of the garden).

The house stands in the western half of the park, with entrance drives to the NW and (a longer one) to the S of it. At both entrances there are gates, gate piers, and a two-storey classical lodge. The tarmac north drive winds through a wooded area to a level forecourt of grass with a rectangular tarmac area in front of the main entrance to the house. The south drive skirts the forecourt to the N and sweeps round southwards past the lake and straight to the B4347. This drive is now reduced to a farm track.

The park is largely in agricultural use (mixed pasture and cultivation), with plantations mainly along the watercourses in the western part. (The lake at the head of the watercourse on the W side of the park is within the garden/pleasure grounds.) Below the lake, in a belt of woodland, is an artificial pond, now more or less silted up.

In the north-east corner of the park the ground rises to a small hill overlooking the Monnow valley. On the top of this hill, in the middle of a wood (mostly former Forestry Commission plantation, planted in about 1960), is a circular stone folly tower (Hilston Tower), which may be slightly earlier than the park, possibly dating to the end of the 18th century. It is three storeys high, with an open top, and windows and an entrance on the ground floor. Holes for floor joists and stair treads are visible, and a down-pipe is exposed in the wall, suggesting that there was originally a roof.

STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

Drives

N drive: a short tarmac drive on the NW side of the house. Winding, past woodland and the Home Farm to the E and an area of woodland to the W, and arriving at main front of house, where rectangular tarmac area surrounded by lawn.

S drive: a longer drive to S of house. Gravel, used as farm track. Curves around N side of forecourt to join N drive in front of house. W side edged with ha-ha (low revetment wall and ditch) N of lake, where drive forms the boundary between park and garden.

In the north-east corner of the park a track leads off the small lane east of Crossway (SO 451193) eastwards through woodland to the top of the hill, where there is a folly tower (Hilston Tower). The track passes this, and runs in a loop to the west of it. This was presumably a carriage track to the tower. It is now very overgrown in places, and is virtually impassable.

WATER FEATURES

Several springs in the park (mainly in the western half) give rise to watercourses which run eastwards towards the R. Monnow. That in the NW

corner of the park flows directly into the lake. Below the lake, in woodland, is a small artificial pond, now more or less silted up.

BUILT FEATURES

Lodges

N lodge: two-storey neo-classical building on the W side of the N entrance (private house)

S lodge: (SO 444181) a two-storey neo-classical building on the W side of the S entrance (private house), similar in style and size to the N lodge.

Gates and railings

N gates: Rendered square gate piers with small ball finials. Side pedestrian gates on both sides. Iron gates, and iron railings both sides.

On W side of S drive (N of lake) iron railings and iron posts with chains between them, set into revetment wall (some posts fallen).

S gates: similar to N gates

Hilston Tower

(SO 458194)

This is a three-storey folly tower built on the top of the hill in the north-east corner of the park. It is probably of late 18th century date. It is a tall circular tower built of roughly coursed old red sandstone, with patches of rendering on the surface. The tower appears to have been built with two different red sandstones - the stone on the northern side has weathered much more badly than that on the south. The base is slightly wider, with a dressed stone top. The top is open, and there are no internal floors, although holes for floor joists and stair treads are visible. The entrance is on the N side, and is a wide opening with a horizontal lintel. Four wide windows are spaced at regular intervals around the ground floor. Horizontal wooden lintels survive on some. Higher up the walls there are narrow slit windows. Although no roof survives there is evidence that there once was one in the form of a down-pipe in the thickness of the wall, now exposed in one place.

PLANTED COMPONENTS

The trees on either side of the N drive are mainly deciduous (oak, sweet chestnut), with an underplanting of evergreen shrubs. The plantations are of mixed deciduous and coniferous trees. The wood in the north-east corner of the park is now largely modern coniferous plantation (*Tsuga heterophylla*, planted in about 1960; about to be felled).

BOUNDARIES

W side: drive and field boundary
N side: road, track, field boundary
E side: field boundaries
S side: track, field boundaries

ESSENTIAL SETTING, VIEWPOINTS AND CONTINUATIONS OF FEATURES BEYOND THE
PARK, EYECATCHERS ETC.

Essential setting: farmland to E, S and W of park
View: S from SE front of house and garden (A on map)

LAND-USE

Agricultural: pasture and cultivation
Woodland: unmanaged

ELEMENTS OF BOTANICAL OR OTHER NATURE CONSERVATION INTEREST

None known

SURVIVAL OF INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS

Structural components: all
Water features: most
Built features: all
Planted components: most

THE PLEASURE GARDEN

Grid ref SO 446187

Date/style c. 1840 and later/formal; pleasure grounds

GENERAL DESCRIPTION AND LAYOUT

The garden and pleasure grounds lie to the SE and SW of the house. They were made at the same time as the house was rebuilt in c. 1840 by Mr. Cave. The garden lies to the SE of the house, around which is a flagstone path. Below this is a levelled lawn bounded by a grass scarp. Two grass paths at the W end of the lawn lead down the grass slope W of the house to the lake below. To the E of the main lawn is a further lawn (formerly tarmac), to the NE of which is the overgrown Italian rose garden, a roughly circular area surrounded by a low clipped yew hedge. Remnants of formal planting, such as single cypresses in the angles of the W and S sides, are visible, but the interior is overrun by seedling trees. In the middle are the remains of a circular stone-lined pool and fountain. To the south of this area, in the corner of the garden, is an area of tangled yew and deciduous trees, beneath which is a subterranean icehouse. Only the top of its entrance on the E side is visible. The garden is bounded on the E by a stone revetment wall, and on the S by a ha-ha opposite the house and an iron fence on the slope to the west. From the S front of the house there is a panoramic view of the park. There are a few ornaments in the gardens, including two cast iron urns on cast iron square plinths (the urn and plinth of one have become separated).

To the SW of the house is a larger and more informal part of the gardens - the pleasure grounds. Below the house is a grass slope with a few specimen trees in its northern half. Two grass walks lead down this slope to a wooded area in a small valley, in which is an artificial lake, dammed at its southern end. The stone revetted lake has a very sinuous outline, with a long inlet on the W side, at the end of which are steps up to a rustic stone arch leading to the S drive. There are two stone-revetted islands, the larger kidney-shaped, the smaller circular, both of which are ornamentally planted with evergreen trees and shrubs. On the E shore of the lake is a ruined stone boathouse, approached by stone steps, and a simple domed alcove 'grotto' set into a rustic stone wall. The woodland around the lake is planted with a mixture of deciduous and coniferous trees and shrubs, including pines, cypresses, monkey puzzles, copper beech, yews and laurels.

STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

Terraces and paths

A wide grass terrace on the SE and SW sides of the house, c. 1 m. below house level. Above it on the SE side a flagstone path runs the length of the portico, outside it. There is a 0.6 m. high scarp at the outer edge of the terrace. On the SW side of the house the flagstone path has a 3-sided central projection with a corresponding step below it. At the E end of the SE front of the house steps and a flagstone path lead round the SE part of the house.

There are two grass paths leading to the pleasure grounds: one at the NW end of the terrace on the SW side and one on the SE. The first runs straight from the W corner of the house down to the boathouse on the lake. Just above the boathouse the path is sunken and curved. The second is a curving grass path below the terrace on the SE side which runs down to the S end of the lake through a shrubbery.

Ha-ha

The ha-ha forms the boundary between the SE garden and the park. Its drystone wall is c. 1 m. high, and is in fairly good condition. At its E end it continues as a low stone wall, which is ruinous along the NE side of the garden. On the W it ends at the end of the terraced lawn,

and an iron fence continues the boundary between pleasure grounds and park down to the lake.

Water features

At the foot of the grass slope to the SW of the house is the lake. This is artificial, fed by a spring at its N end, and dammed at its S end by a massive earthen dam across the valley floor (one known leak). Its maximum dimensions are c. 100 m. N-S and 60 m. E-W. In shape it is very sinuous, with curving inlets all around, and a long narrow inlet on the W side at the end of which are steps to a path leading to a rustic arch to the S drive. The sides are revetted with sloping stone walls (ruinous in places), and there is a stone sluice and overflow channel on the S side. In the centre of the lake is a kidney-shaped island, also with a sloping stone revetment wall round it. Between it and the E shore is a smaller circular island, similarly revetted, with the faint trace of a path running E-W across it between two rows of golden cypresses. There are signs that these islands were linked to each other and to the shore (circular island-E shore) by bridges, now gone. On the E side are a boathouse and grotto (see Built Components).

BUILT COMPONENTS

Steps

Concrete steps down to terraced lawn on SE side at E end of portico. Stone steps down same slope at E end of flagstone path.

Lake: 3 stone steps in sunk path down to boathouse. Flight of 14 stone steps on W side, at end of inlet.

Walls

On the W side of the lake, reached from the lake by steps, is a rustic doorway leading to the S drive. It is built of large irregular stones, with a large stone lintel across the top.

The NW side of the Italian rose garden, SE of the house, is bounded by a low drystone wall.

Boathouse

On the E side of the lake, N of the islands, is a ruined boathouse projecting into the lake. It is built of stone and is reached by a narrow sunken path. The slope above the boathouse is revetted with a wall c. 2.2 m. high. In front of this is a U-shaped 'harbour' with a narrow ledge around it of dressed stone. On the N side there is a rectangular stone projection into the lake with a bath-sized sunken pit in it. The roof has disappeared.

Grotto

Between the circular island and the boathouse the lake is revetted with a vertical wall of large irregular stones c. 2 m. high. In the middle of this wall is a semi-circular alcove with a lintel of rougher stones. It is c. 1.8 m. in height, 2.5 m. in depth and 1.2 m. in width across the entrance. The interior surface is of the same stone as the wall.

Icehouse

In the SE corner of the garden, in a very neglected and overgrown area of trees (evergreen and deciduous) and shrubs, some fallen. It is subterranean, with its top showing as a low circular mound above ground, very overgrown, with a large leaning yew tree on top. The top of the entrance is visible on the E side, the rest blocked up with earth and debris.

ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENTS

Paving

A stone flagged terrace around the SW and SE sides of the house. Stone flagged path below steps at E end of terrace, running around E end of house.

Plant containers

Two cast iron (painted white) urns, with intertwined handles and heads in relief on the sides. One stands at the W end of the forecourt on a rectangular iron plinth (also painted). (Underneath it is a well.) The other stands, without its plinth, in the middle of a millstone just to the S of the ruined coach house. Its plinth stands in the SE corner of the garden, near the icehouse.

Stone plinths

At the N end of the terrace to the SW of the house are three low stone plinths, c. 0.6 m. high, two on either side of the top of the grass path, and one further N. On their tops are the stubs of missing stone ornaments.

On the W side of the entrance to the Italian rose garden is a circular stone plinth, c. 0.7 m. high, with an iron tenon in its top.

Bird bath

Below the centre of the terrace SW of the house is a circular stone bird bath, c. 0.8 m. in diameter.

Pool and fountain

In the centre of the Italian rose garden to the SE of the house are the remains of a circular stone pool and fountain. Both are very overgrown, and only the rolled lip of the pool is visible. Parts of the fountain remain (information administrator) but are not visible.

PLANTED COMPONENTS

Pleasure grounds

The pleasure grounds lie to the SW of the house. The eastern half is a large grass slope with a few specimen trees in its N half, in particular a wellingtonia and a lime, both large, mature trees. Along the southern boundary is an area of shrubs and trees, mainly rhododendrons, with the trees including a large cedar.

The western half of the pleasure grounds is taken up with the lake and its surrounding woodland. The woodland planting is ornamental, with a mixture of deciduous and coniferous trees and an underplanting of evergreens such as laurel. Near the SE corner of the lake is a large mature beech; along the S side are pines and cypresses, on the W side are two large monkey puzzle trees, and N of the steps on the W side is a large copper beech. The large, kidney-shaped island is planted with cypresses, yews, and Portugal laurels (some recently cut down), and the small circular island has five golden cypresses in two rows either side of the path that crosses the island. The sixth has been cut down, and its stump remains. Evergreens (yews, laurels etc.) are planted above the boathouse

Garden

The garden lies on the SE side of the house. Most is taken up with a large terraced lawn, with a further lawn (formerly tarmac) to the E, on the edge of which is a large sweet chestnut tree. In the SE corner of the garden is a neglected area of evergreen (yew) and deciduous trees, some of which are fallen. The door into the kitchen garden, E of the house, is flanked by a large yew on the E and laurel on the W.

On the NE side of the garden is the Italian rose garden, a roughly circular area surrounded by a low clipped yew hedge. The whole area is overgrown and neglected. The entrance is by a flight of shallow steps in the NW corner, to the W of which is a yew tree. The

hedge has angled protrusions in the middle of the W and S sides, in the angle of which are single cypress trees. There is a further yew tree at the end of the hedge on the E side. The interior is overrun by seedling trees.

Reconstructions of original planted features
None

Special collections of garden plants
None

Documented living plants
None

Other (including elements of nature conservation interest)

The grass slope to the W of the house, in the Pleasure Grounds, is a plant conservation area, maintained to encourage wild flowers (cut once a year).

ESSENTIAL SETTING AND VIEWS BEYOND THE SITE

Essential setting: park to E, S and W
View out S from terrace of house and S lawn of garden across park (A on map).

ANY SPECIAL FEATURES

None

SURVIVAL OF INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS

Structural components: most
Built components: some
Water features: most
Architectural ornaments: some
Planted components: most trees, some shrubs

UTILITARIAN GARDENS

NAME Kitchen garden

Grid ref SO 447188

Date/style 19th-century/walled kitchen garden

DESCRIPTION (categories as for the pleasure garden)

The large walled kitchen garden stands to the NE of the house, E of the entrance forecourt. It is rectangular, and is orientated SW-NE. The walls are of red brick, mostly c. 3 m. high (c. 2 m. to the E of the door on the S side, E wall c. 2.2 m.) with a flat capping. They are in good condition. The N wall and the N end of the E wall are whitewashed and the N wall is buttressed. There are entrances on the W (two, one door and one wider gate with plain square gate piers and double wooden doors), N (door), E (door near N end) and S (door into the garden). The door into the garden is arched, with a wrought iron gate in it.

The interior (used in the summer as a caravan park) is grassed over, with a few isolated old fruit trees remaining, some of which are in rows, indicating the line of former paths. The ground slopes gently towards the S. In the S corner an outbuilding extends slightly into the garden. A cross revetment wall divides the garden in two, c. two-thirds of the way towards the E end. It is a low stone wall, c. 0.8 m. high, with a flat stone capping and two flights of steps down to the lower eastern part of the garden. The steps have been rebuilt recently. There is a NW-SE scarp c. 1.5 m. high across the middle of this part.

To the N of the kitchen garden is a narrow area between the N wall and farm buildings in which there are ruined lean-to sheds and glass-houses. This area is very overgrown, with dismantled glass-houses, lights etc. piled up all over it.

SOURCES

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

Primary

Catalogue of contents of the mansion for sale, by direction of Mrs E. Wright Lawley, 1921: Newport Reference Library (pqM 447.5 645)

Secondary

J. Bradney, A History of Monmouthshire, Part I, p. 57.

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