

EWENNY PRIORY

Ref number	PGW (Gm) 14 (GLA)
OS Map	170
Grid ref	SS 912 778
Former county	Mid Glamorgan
Unitary authority	The Vale of Glamorgan
Community council	Ewenny
Designations	Listed buildings: Ewenny Priory Grade I; Ewenny Priory House Grade II; Guardianship Ancient Monument: Ewenny Priory (Gm 190)

Site evaluation	Grade II
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Primary reasons for grading A historic house, built within the precinct of a mediaeval Benedictine priory, and incorporating parts of its claustral buildings. The garden occupies the monastic precinct, utilising some of its massive walling as walls for the kitchen garden. The walled sixteenth-century deer park belonging to the Tudor house survives to the south.

Type of site	Deer park; landscape park; informal gardens; walled kitchen garden
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Main phases of construction	Second half of sixteenth century; 1803-05
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Site description

Ewenny Priory is situated on the flood plain of the Ogmore valley, just to the south of a canalized stretch of the river, to the south of Bridgend. A Benedictine Priory was founded here by Maurice de Londres of Ogmore Castle in about 1141. St Michael's church was built by William de Londres, Maurice's father, between 1116 and 1126. Later in the twelfth century, and with additions in about 1300, the substantial precinct walls and gatehouses were built, enclosing a roughly rectangular area to the south and west of the church, and giving the priory a fortified character. The house, outbuildings, and gardens were built within and incorporate parts of the monastic precinct.

At the Dissolution the priory, which then had only three monks, was leased and shortly afterwards, in 1545, bought by Sir Edward Carne. During the sixteenth century the priory buildings to the south of the church were converted into a large house, parts of which survived the subsequent rebuilding. In the early eighteenth century the property passed by marriage to the Turbervills, in whose ownership it remains. An engraving of 1741 by the Buck brothers shows the two-storey Tudor house on the site of the present one. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the

house was ruinous: in 1787 Viscount Torrington visited and described it as a 'miserable mansion'. It was Richard Turbervill Picton, elder brother of Sir Thomas Picton, who rebuilt the house in 1803-05 to the design of an unidentified London architect. The precinct walls and east end of the church were taken into state guardianship in 1949.

The house is a five-bay, stone Georgian mansion standing on the site of the south wing of the Tudor house. It has two-storeys above a basement, with a projecting porch in the middle of the south front reached by a flight of stone steps. The west wing of the Tudor house was adapted as outbuildings and part of the house, with an arched entrance into an inner courtyard, the site of the monastic cloisters. The third storey was added to the wing as a billiards room in the 1890s.

To the west of the house is a rectangular gravelled stable court entered at the north end between a restored mediaeval barn and the north gatehouse of the priory precinct. On its east side the west wing of the house extends as various stone outbuildings. A second stonebarn, matching the earlier one, was added south of the north tower in 1871. On the west side of the court is a free-standing single-storey stable block with a central arched entrance.

The park occupies a rectangular area to the south of the house, on ground sloping gently up towards the south. The park has a rubble stone wall along its east, west and south sides. The entrance, flanked by gate piers and a lodge, is near the west end of the south side. A drive, now grassed over but still in use, runs north to enter the garden through the South Gatehouse archway. The park is open grassland, with belts of trees around the perimeter and a large clump near the north-west corner. A few isolated deciduous trees of mixed age ornament the remainder of the park.

The walls of the park stand up to 3 m high, with rounded rustic coping stones on top. The entrance is through wooden gates under a gothic archway in the lodge gatehouse. This is a castellated gothic building of rubble stone construction built for Col. Turbervill by the Cardiff architect John Pritchard in about 1898 as a replica of the South Gatehouse. The living quarters are in a two-storey octagonal tower to the east of the entrance archway.

The perimeter belts are planted mainly with mixed deciduous trees, including oak, ash, beech and sycamore. There is a conspicuous row of large pines planted in the late nineteenth century along the northern end of the east side and there are also some on the west side. The large clump in the north-west corner is of mixed deciduous and coniferous trees, and was formerly surrounded by a small stone ha-ha that has now been filled in. The bulge in the perimeter belt along the east side of the park marks the site of an old clay pit. The isolated trees are oak, plane and horse chestnut.

At the north end of the park, between the ha-ha bounding the garden and a canalized stream, which runs east-west across the park, is a rectangular levelled grass area with some large box bushes at its east end. This is the former archery lawn, probably made in the early nineteenth century. It continued in use until 1914. The box bushes were part of the screening behind the targets. To the east is a small pond made in the 1960s by the present owner.

The park, known as the Buckcourt, was first a deer park dating to the second half of the sixteenth century, made by Sir Edward Carne or his son Thomas. Writing in about 1578 Rice Merrick noted two deer parks at Ewenny, one for fallow deer and one for red deer. This park is likely to be the fallow deer park; the whereabouts of the red deer park is not known. The walls of the park are all that remain of this Tudor park. Merrick also noted fishponds that 'Mr Thomas Carne made', thus dating them to

the late sixteenth century. Of these there are no remains. Their probable location is where the present pond at the western end of the grounds is situated. The park was altered in character to become a landscape park by Richard Picton Turbervill at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when his new house was built. The monastic precinct wall to the south of the house was demolished and replaced by a ha-ha to open up the view from the house and garden towards the park. When the archery lawn was made the stream, which probably originally ran closer to the house, was diverted and canalized along the south edge of the lawn. The park was probably planted at this time, with the western perimeter belt being given a wavy outline to soften it. The hill to the south, beyond the Corntown road, which is part of the estate, was ornamentally planted with a large clump of deciduous trees. These are seen on the skyline from the house and garden, and form an important part of the view to the south. By 1877 (1st edition Ordnance Survey map) the park had achieved its present layout, and it has been little altered since.

The gardens lie to the south, east, and west of the house, their central core falling within the monastic precinct of the former priory. The precinct walls, towers and gatehouses have been integrated into the gardens, dividing them into sections and forming their boundaries. There are three main areas: the informal lawned gardens immediately around the house; the woodland grounds to the west, and the partly walled garden to the east.

The gardens were largely created by Richard Turbervill Picton in 1803-05, at the same time as the present house was built. Before this date the south curtain wall of the priory remained standing, and Carter's plan of 1803 shows three walled courts within it, to the south of the house, which may have been gardens. The Buck engraving of 1741 depicts the castellated walls with trees showing over their tops and a row of fastigate trees extending eastwards from the house. By 1877 (1st edition Ordnance Survey map) the gardens had attained their present general layout.

The core of the garden is the lawned area in which the house is set. This is bounded on the west by the east wall of the walled garden, on the south by the ha-ha, and on the east by the east wall of the monastic precinct. Two towers of mediaeval origin, the South Gatehouse, and the dovecote tower, stand at the south-west and south-east corners respectively. The drive enters the garden through iron gates flanked by tall stone gate piers topped by ball finials, and with flanking walls, at the south end of the stable court, to the west of the house. The drive runs from the gates to a circle in the level lawn in front of the house. From the house and lawn there is an uninterrupted view out across the park and beyond to the clump on the skyline. This view was created by the demolition in 1803-05 of the south curtain wall of the monastic precinct between the South Gatehouse and the dovecote tower. The plan of 1803 by Carter shows the central section already demolished. The wall was replaced with a straight rubble stone ha-ha built slightly further south, on a line just beyond the two towers. The South Gatehouse is a castellated octagonal tower and attached entrance archway, originally built at the end of the twelfth century, remodelled and extended in about 1300, and rebuilt as a cottage by John Pritchard for Col. Turbervill in 1866. Outside it the drive from the park runs for a short distance between iron fencing and then enters the grounds through a simple iron gate flanked by square stone piers and low stone walls. From the South Gatehouse there are two drives: one runs eastwards to the circle in front of the house and the other runs northwards along the east wall of the kitchen garden to the North Gatehouse. The first was in place by 1877, and probably dates to the early nineteenth century; the second was later.

A flight of stone steps, shown on the 1877 map, lead down from the lawn to the archery field opposite the front door of the house. These are flanked by large Irish yews and by short stretches of stone wall on top of the ha-ha built by the present owner. Until recently semi-circular Regency iron benches stood in front of the yews. These were probably placed in the garden in the early nineteenth century, but have been stolen. The garden was also ornamented with two large fluted cast iron vases on stone plinths flanking the steps to the porch, but one of these has also been stolen. At the west end of this area the garden is planted with mixed ornamental trees including some large and ancient-looking yews next to the gatehouse. On either side of the gravel circle are two beeches. Although both planted at the same time by the present owner, to replace elms, that to the west is considerably smaller than that to the east, and is thought to have been planted on one of the walls that underly this area. At the east end of the lawn is a large weeping ash tree.

To the east of the house two slight scarps divide the lawn into three levels, the central one forming a croquet lawn. A large copper beech stands at the north end, and to the north is the family burial ground. A gravel path runs east from the north end of the house to a fine round-headed romanesque arched doorway set in the stone wall. This is the former west door of the church, removed and re-erected here by Richard Turbervill Picton when he shortened the church by one bay in the early nineteenth century. The east boundary of this part of the garden is formed by the precinct wall, at the south end of which is the dovecote tower. This is a substantial, austere rectangular tower, built soon after 1141, now roofless, with small arched windows in the upper east and west walls and a doorway on the north side. The tower was converted, possibly in the Tudor period, into a dovecote; the interior has alternating rows of nesting holes, built of stone, completely covering the walls to above window level. In the north-west corner of this area, to the west of the stable court, is a small walled garden laid out by the present owners. It was formerly used as a drying ground.

The second section of the gardens is the informal area to the south-west of the house, beyond the priory precinct. This is a largely wooded area, formerly part of the park. It has been laid out as ornamental woodland grounds by the present owner, who has created a small informal pond to the west of the drive, a mown clearing in the woodland beyond it, and has planted ornamental trees and shrubs within the woodland setting. The pond is fringed by tall *Populus alba*.

The third area lies at the east end of the garden, beyond the precinct wall. This was created in the early nineteenth century and was originally an orchard. It is a rectangular area, sloping gently to the south. The northern half has a greenhouse dating to 1890 against its north wall. It was reduced to its present size after the Second World War. The area is laid out to lawn and beds, with a gravel path running east from the romanesque doorway and a north-south central gravel path and wooden pergola. It also contains a modern swimming pool. At its southern end is a linear pond dammed by a bank along its south side, with a single jet moss-covered small fountain in the middle. The pond was created in the early nineteenth century, and the fountain is fed from the water supply that comes to the house from Corntown to the south-east. To the south of the pond is an informal area of trees and shrubs. It is shown as informally wooded on the 1877 map, but was laid out in its present form in the 1930s. Water is channelled from the pond into a number of winding rills and pools created in the 1930s and reconstructed in concrete in the 1950s. Many of the trees probably date to the nineteenth century, and include large pines and a large horse chestnut which was planted in 1815 to commemorate Lt. General Sir Thomas Picton's departure for

Waterloo. Underplanting is dominated by rhododendrons, with some large clumps of bamboo. The area was originally conceived as a rhododendron, azalea and primula garden.

The kitchen garden lies to the west of the pleasure garden. It is a four-sided area bounded on the north, west and south sides by the high stone mediaeval walls of the priory precinct and on the east side by a stone wall built to enclose the area for a kitchen garden in the early nineteenth century. The crenellated walls were built in the thirteenth century, soon after the gatehouses, and stand to their original height, with a wall-walk behind the battlements. The north-west corner has a round tower.

The interior is laid out with perimeter and cross grass paths on the lines of the original paths shown on the 1877 map. Near the south end of the central axis is a circular mediaeval stone-lined pool, with a low parapet and a flight of steps leading down to the water on the north side. A few ancient fruit trees and a large, ancient, recumbent mulberry remain. The majority of the garden is in productive soft fruit and vegetable use.

Sources

Primary

Information from owner.

Engraving by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck of Ewenny Priory, 1741.

Copies by James Richardson, 1897-1900, of Carter's drawings of 1803/04 in the British Museum: private collection.

Secondary

Haslam, R., 'Ewenny Priory, Mid Glamorgan', *Country Life* 23 October 1986, pp. 1270-75.

Whittle, E., *A Guide to Ancient and Historic Wales. Glamorgan and Gwent* (1992), pp. 163-66.

Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales, *Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Glamorgan*, IV (1981), p. 338.