

= Hilston Park =

Hilston Park is a country house and estate located between the villages of Newcastle and Skenfrith , in Monmouthshire , Wales , close to the border with Herefordshire , England . The house and park are situated in the Monnow valley , beside the B4347 road , 7 @. @ 9 miles (12 @. @ 7 km) by road northwest of Monmouth and just over 1 mile (1 @. @ 6 km) southwest of Skenfrith .

The Palladian mansion , built in 1838 for Bristolian banker George Cave , is a Grade II * listed building and the park 's flower meadow is a Site of Special Scientific Interest . The park includes two early 20th century lodges at both entrance gates , a ruined coach house , a lake and boathouse , a pond , and several streams , several gardens and areas of woodland , and Hilston Tower , a late 18th @- @ century folly made of red sandstone in the northeastern corner of the grounds . The house now serves as a residential outdoor education centre run by Gwent Outdoor Centres , an organisation jointly supported by the local authorities of Newport , Torfaen , Blaenau Gwent and Monmouthshire .

= = History = =

Hilston House was for many years the principal estate and mansion in the parish of St. Maughans . In the 17th and 18th centuries it was the residence of the Needham family , although Henry Milbourne , an important 17th century magistrate of the county , is also reported to have lived here at one time . Sebastian Needham is said to have been buried at Skenfrith , on 26 March 1723 , having fathered nine children . The house remained in the family , who were Catholic , for four generations . Following this stable period of ownership , accounting for about a century , the estate then changed hands a considerable number of times within the next 70 years . It was eventually sold by John Needham , a barrister of Grays Inn , to Sir William Pilkington when Needham moved to Somerset . Pilkington sold it to James Jones of the Graig , who sold it to Sir Robert Brownrigg , G.C.B. a distinguished officer in the Peninsula War . He died on 27 May 1833 , aged 76 years and his monument may be seen on the south wall of St. Maughan 's Church . After his death the house was sold to Thomas Coates of Lancashire . Shortly afterwards , on 12 September 1838 , the house was destroyed by fire .

It was then sold to George Cave , a banker of Bristol , who was responsible for building a new Palladian mansion which remains today . He sold it to Alfred Crawshay , who sold it to John Hamilton who finally completed the building . His son , Captain Pryce Hamilton , brother to Alice Mary Sinclair , seems to have added considerably to the Hilston Estate and it appears that he also purchased Norton Court from Henry Somerset , 8th Duke of Beaufort , and bought Skenfrith Mill and Lower Duffryn around 1870 .

Pryce Hamilton sold Hilston House in about 1873 to James Graham , High Sheriff of Monmouthshire in 1881 , who passed the house on to Douglas William Graham , who was living at Hilston in 1902 , when the hall was panelled with the oak from the hall of the Lower Duffryn . Graham was also responsible for other improvements , the stone and brick buildings at Home Farm , the Lodges , New Cottages and the reservoir . It was then owned for some time by the Lawley family , who had made their fortune in shipping and cotton in Manchester . In the 1930s , Hilston Park was the residence of Edmund Henry Bevan (High Sheriff of Northamptonshire in 1912) , whose riches were by inheritance from the Portland cement made at Bevan Works in Northfleet , Kent . He married Joan Mary Conyers Norton , the eldest daughter of the 5th Baron Grantley , in the 1930s .

It was purchased by T. E. Davies in the 1940s , who sold the house and estate on 17 October 1947 . In the 1950s , the house was converted to a school . It became an outdoor education centre in 1971 . It continues today as a residential centre , operated since 1996 by Gwent Outdoor Education Service , a joint service supported by the four local authorities of Blaenau Gwent , Monmouthshire , Newport and Torfaen . It caters mainly for school and college students on organised visits , and hosts activities such as orienteering and archery , with other activities such as canoeing and caving at nearby sites .

= = Architecture and layout = =

= = = Grounds = = =

= = = = Gardens and lodges = = = =

Hilston House , which is situated in the western half of the park , has two entrances . The south drive " skirts the forecourt to the N and sweeps round southwards past the lake and straight to the B4347 " , and the main drive in tarmac , from the northwest , " 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 . " Two early 20th century lodges are contained on the estate , one at the northern end of the front drive and the other to the south , on the B4347 . One of these , Lower Dyffryn , is an E @-@ shaped building of Early Tudor style , with a slate roof , three gables , and a projecting chimney @-@ breast . The coach @-@ house on the northeastern side of the drive was largely demolished in 1972 ; all that remains is its rear and side walls .

In the early 1920s , the estate was described as being 1 @, @ 050 acres (420 ha) , and that there were 6 miles (9 @. @ 7 km) of fishing along the River Monnow . The park 's flower meadow is a Site of Special Scientific Interest . Cadw cites the reason for it being listed as an SSSI in 1990 as " 19th @-@ century park and garden , with some well preserved features , including ornamental lake and folly tower " . Much of the park is under agricultural cultivation , and several streams arising from springs , mainly in the western side of the park flow through and enter the River Monnow . To the southeast of the house is an Italian rose garden which contains a circular stone pool and fountain . To the northeast of the house is a large walled kitchen garden , rectangular in shape , and framed by red brick walls , mostly 3 metres (9 @. @ 8 ft) in height , but 2 @. @ 2 metres (7 ft 3 in) on the eastern side and 2 metres (6 ft 7 in) to the east of the door on the southern side . The kitchen garden is orientated in a southwest @-@ northeast direction , with a buttressed northern wall , two entrances on the western side , and one on each of the northern , eastern and southern walls . In the summer months it is used as a caravan park . The area to the north of the kitchen garden contains mainly ruined sheds and glasshouses and was wildly overgrown at the time of its surveying in December 1990 .

= = = = Lake = = = =

A lake and silted artificial pond is situated to the southwest of the house , separated by a belt of woodland consisting of mainly deciduous , coniferous trees and shrubs , and also pines , cypresses , monkey puzzle trees , copper beeches , yews and laurel trees . The lake , roughly 100 metres (330 ft) at longest from north to south and roughly 60 metres (200 ft) at its widest point , is cited by Cadw to be " fed by a spring at its [north] end , and dammed at its [south] end by a massive earthen dam across the valley floor . " The lake contains a " kidney @-@ shaped island " , framed by a sloping stone revetment wall , and a similar smaller island nearer the eastern shore . On the eastern side of the lake is a boathouse and grotto . The grotto is situated in the middle of a revetment wall of about 2 metres high built of large irregularly placed stones , and is characterised as a semi @-@ circular alcove , 1 @. @ 8 metres (5 ft 11 in) in height , 2 @. @ 5 metres (8 ft 2 in) in depth and 1 @. @ 2 metres (3 ft 11 in) in width .

= = = = Hilston Tower = = = =

There is also a woodland , a former Forestry Commission plantation , planted around 1960 in the north @-@ eastern corner of the park on a small hill , which contains a circular folly tower , of three storeys , in the centre . The tower , built from red sandstone , is believed to date to the late 18th

century . The northern side is considerably more eroded by the weather than the southern side . The tower is marginally wider at the base and has no internal floor structure , but contains holes for floor joists and stair treads . There are four windows on the ground floors and narrower windows higher up .

== House ==

Much work was done on the house in the expectation of a visit by George IV , which never happened . The main building has been described as " a major early Victorian stuccoed classical mansion , about which little is known " . The two @-@ storeyed north front features nine bays , the outermost ones slightly recessed , with a central pedimented porte @-@ cochère of four massive Ionic columns . The southeast front has a single @-@ storey portico running the length of the front , which leads to a conservatory at the northeast end of the house . The architect is not known . The building was extended on its eastern side and its interior remodelled , around 1912 , when a large ballroom in the Arts and Crafts style , designed by Arthur Grove was added . This features elaborate plasterwork and decoration in the form of signs of the zodiac . It became a Grade II * listed building on 5 January 1952 .