



OLD
BEAUPRE
CASTLE

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC BUILDING AND WORKS

Official Guide-book

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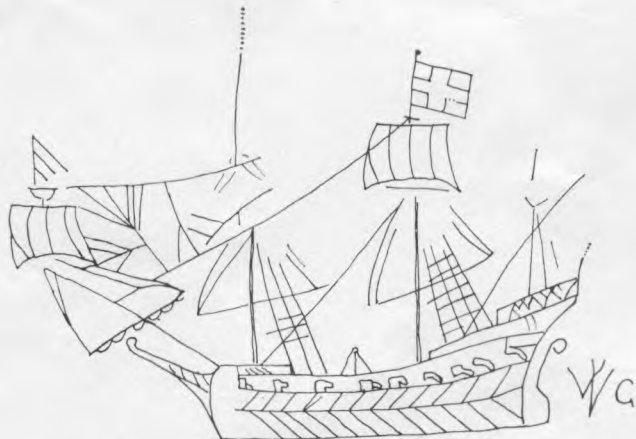
OLD BEAUPRE CASTLE lies one mile south-west of the village of St. Hilary to the south of the main Cardiff-Bridgend road, A48, two miles east of Cowbridge and eleven miles west of Cardiff.

ADMISSION

At any time without charge

The arms on the cover are those of the Bassets, drawn from the shield on the inner porch.

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The 17th-century drawing in the porch (see page 11).

W. A. B. Hopkins

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC BUILDING AND WORKS
ANCIENT MONUMENTS AND HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Old Beaupre Castle

GLAMORGAN

by

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HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE

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Introduction

THE SECLUDED ruins of Beaupre form a picturesque and nostalgic reminder of an age when agriculture, not coal and iron, was the basic industry of Glamorgan. Set in the parish of St. Hilary, almost a mile to the south of the village, it is only two miles from Cowbridge and the busy Cardiff to Bridgend road. It stands about 80 feet above sea level, on a bank contained in a southern curve of the small river Thaw; a fact which clearly influenced the choice of site more than the existence of better arable soils a mile to the north. The house is largely built of the lias limestone on which it stands, whilst the dressings are of Sutton and white Quarella stone, both local sources; but the porch is of oolitic Bath stone, probably from Monkton Farleigh in Wiltshire.

Before dealing with its rather exotic and evocative name, it is as well to point out that the suffix 'castle' is a misnomer. This is clearly derived from the castellated appearance of the present Elizabethan ruins, which were more probably inspired by aggrandizement than by any idea of real defence. However, although we do not know the extent and nature of the original medieval buildings which it contains, the fact that it includes a sturdy gate-house and is set on top of a steep bank, suggests that the builders must have given some thought to defence.

Apart from the appendage 'castle', the house has also been known as 'Old Beaupre' since the erection of the 19th-century 'New Beaupre' about half a mile west of St. Hilary. The name is unusual in the area, and there seems little doubt that it is Anglo-Norman in origin; being derived from the old French, *beau-repaire* (beautiful retreat). An exact parallel is Beaufepaire in Hants, whilst there are many variations such as Beaulieu, Belchamp, Belver and Bear Park. It may be of some significance that many of these place-names are given to sites with monastic associations, although there is no record that this was the case at Beaupre. There are variant spellings such as Bewerpere in 1376, Beaupier, and Bowper, but the present Beaupre does not appear until 1665. The house is known locally by the Welsh form Bewpyr, pronounced Bew-per.

History

BEAUPRE has always been associated with the Bassets, who were descended from one of the earliest Norman settlers in Britain; the name Thurston Basset is on the Roll of Battle Abbey. They became firmly established in several midland counties, where they held lands in the 12th century. There is also an old branch of the family in Cornwall, but it is impossible to ascertain when they first settled in Glamorgan. Several Welsh pedigrees claim that the first Basset came to Wales in the service of Robert Fitzhamon, one of the first Norman lords of Glamorgan, and that for his services he was granted the Lordship of St. Hilary. Unfortunately most of the pedigrees, which were compiled in the 16th and 17th centuries, are extremely unreliable and in some cases completely fictitious, although others should be shown some respect.

However, the de Kardiff family are recorded as holding St. Hilary in 1197, and it seems unlikely that the Bassets held land in Glamorgan until much later. Indeed, the first mention of the actual site in 1376 states that John Basset of Bewerpere 'held a moiety of a knights fee'; while in 1320 a Thomas Basset is said to have held half a fee in St. Hilary. In short, it is quite reasonable to suppose that the Bassets were responsible for the earliest 13th-century work on the site. In St. Hilary's parish church there is a full-sized effigy in plate armour with a surcoat bearing the Basset arms. Along one side and at the foot, is an inscription stating that it represents Richard Basset who died on 14th December 1423. Most pedigrees agree that his father was John, his grandfather Sir Elias and his great-grandfather Thomas; but it is not until the end of the 15th century that there is any agreement about the female side. These wives were all local heiresses, representing both Norman and Welsh families, and from the quality and extent of the medieval remains at Beaupre, the family must have been of some standing. The Welsh rising led by Owain Glyndwr at the beginning of the 15th century caused the destruction of many medieval houses throughout Wales; but there is no record of either the house or family being implicated, although it is tempting to consider that such a set-back or damage might have been the cause of the apparent abandonment of the medieval house by the 16th-century builders.

From medieval times the estate passed through the male line until the 16th century, by which time other branches of the family had been established at Bonvilston and other places in the county. In the middle of the century, Elinor, daughter and sole heir of James Basset of

Beaupre, and wife of Sir Rees Mansel of Margam, died without issue: as a result, the estate passed to her cousin William Basset, who had married Catherine, a daughter of Sir Rees Mansel. Elinor and her cousin were four generations removed from the Richard Basset who died in 1423.

William and Catherine clearly lived at Beaupre and were responsible for some of the 16th-century work, despite the fact that there is a memorial to them both in Monkton Combe Church near Bath. This states that William died on 10th March 1586, aged 80, and that his wife followed him seven years later to the day, also aged 80. Their son Richard also left his mark upon the building and also enriched the pedigrees as he married three times. His first wife was Catherine Bowen of Fishwear, a small yeoman's house of the same period half a mile to the south. He had a son Edward, the male heir, and six other children. His second wife, who had already been twice married, was Margaret, the daughter of Sir John Baglan. It is quite possible that both these ladies were instrumental in getting some building work done at Beaupre, but it was during Richard's last marriage that the final embellishments were added to the house. This was to yet another Catherine—the daughter of Sir Thomas Johnes of Abermarlais and the widow of Thomas Vaughan of Dinorben. The outer gate to the courtyard bears their initials R B . C B with the date 1586. This must have been followed soon afterwards by the building of the courtyard wall; but it is the impressive inner porch Richard added in 1600 that is the glory of Beaupre.

It is remarkable that after the addition of the porch no major additions or alterations were made to the house, and the few minor ones might have been done within the life-time of Richard who was High Sheriff for a second time in 1608. He outlived his eldest son, but his grandson William, said to be of Beaupre, was High Sheriff in 1621. The estate then passed to Sir Richard who fared badly in the Civil War. As a Royalist he was made High Sheriff by the King in 1643, and in 1645 governor of Cardiff Castle, but he was forced to give this up and allowed to go home. However, his unpopularity compelled him to leave and he made his way to Hereford where he hoped to surrender his commission to the King. Unfortunately he was captured when the city fell to Parliamentarians under Colonel Birch on 18th December 1645, and had to pay a fine of £753. Although he arranged to pay this by 17th April 1649 there is little doubt that this crippling blow was the main cause of the abandonment of Beaupre. This is supported by the fact that the family records state he was of Fishwear, a much more modest establishment. His son William, also a fervent Royalist, spent much of his time in London, where it is said he dissipated what was

left of the family fortunes. He was buried in Westminster Abbey in 1667, where his only child Dorothy had been laid three years previously. The estate then passed to his half-brother Richard, who was knighted in 1681. He left six children, and the eldest, Philip who was unmarried, is said to have been the last Basset to have lived at Beaupre. In a small ground-floor room, now part of the farm, is some early 18th-century panelling, which may be all that survives of the refurnishing one would have expected in the principal seat of a family of substance; but the normal 18th-century refinements such as a staircase and large windows were never added.

In 1709 Philip and his youngest sister Dame Priscilla Basset jointly conveyed the manors of Beaupre and St. Hilary to a Christopher Brewster, gent. From then on the property changed hands a number of times, but the family never lost touch with the parish, as the church registers record Bassets of Beaupre well into the second half of the 19th century.

Periods of Construction

To facilitate description, different parts of the buildings are referred to by letters shown on the plan.

The historical development of the structure is complicated when considered in detail, but it falls into two main periods: late 13th-early 14th century and late 16th century. There is no doubt that the oldest part of the building is that to the east, or left of the ornate inner porch. This was the original medieval gate-house (E) and it clearly led to other medieval buildings, either destroyed or represented by the present farmhouse which is not available for inspection; but when this gate-house was built, a building (A) was planned to the west or right.

However (E) and (A) are not of the same date as they are not structurally bonded, and a possible explanation is that the gate-house was built against an even older building which was then rebuilt. A second addition to the gate-house is the block (D) projecting to the north; this is similar to (A) in date, and is clearly an after-thought. All the remaining buildings now open to inspection date from the 16th century, when for some reason the builders seemed to forsake the older site and build on new ground to the north. Here they were free to indulge in the Elizabethan courtyard plan so well described by Sir Francis Bacon.

The 16th-century development is confused in detail but can be summarized as follows:—block (B) was built against the gable end of (A), access between them entailing the destruction of the original gable-end fireplace and its replacement by one inserted in the N. wall.

As the back of this new fireplace was an integral part of the large block (C) which was built against (B), it is clear that little time separated these operations. The next additions were the outer gate-house or lodge dated 1586, followed soon after by the courtyard walls, with minor modifications to block (D). The small rectangular tower and other minor building at the N.W. corner of the courtyard area were also added about this time, and the final addition has the well-known inner porch built in 1600. Minor modifications took place later, but as already stated the usual 18th-century improvements are completely lacking; consequently the building still retains much of the largely fortuitous charm of the Elizabethan period.

Architectural Description

THE house is entered through the outer gate-house, a pleasingly proportioned building standing forward of the enclosure wall. A plain front forms an effective setting for the enriched central doorway. This is a wide opening spanned by a finely worked Tudor arch above which is a large panel; on the caps of its tapering pilasters are the date 1586 and the initials R. B. C. B and R. B. Inserted in the panel is a shield of arms:—(1) Basset (arg. a chevron between three bugle horns stringed sable). (2) De la bere (az. a bend cotised or between six martlets of the second). (3) Turbervill (chequy or and gu. a fess erm.). (4) Iestyn ap Gwrgant (gu. three chevrons ar.). Crest (above a helm a stag's head cabossed between the attires a cross fitchée at the foot ar.). The motto GWELL . ANGAY NACH W ILYD (Better death than shame). Certain features of the design and the fact that the shield contains the arms of Richard's first wife Catherine, not the third, point to this smaller panel being an insertion. Most probably it was originally set over the main entrance prior to the erection of the inner porch in 1600.

The gateway which was closed by a single door leads to a passage about 7 ft. wide paved with shallow steps descending to the plain inner opening. Flanking the passage and entered from it, are two small rooms, lit from the courtyard and provided with fireplaces. The three first-floor and the larger second-floor rooms are entered from the adjacent wall-walk stairs. The attic, lit by windows on the E.-S., must have been reached by an internal stair.

The curtain walls which stand to a height of about 18 ft. have lost their crenellation: although not bonded with it, they must be virtually of the same date as the gate-house. Somewhat similar to the earlier walls at Tretower, Breconshire, these were not for military use, but merely

to impress the onlooker and to form the courtyard. To the west of the gate-house the wall was thickened to accommodate a stone stair to the first and second floors. There is a similar stair to the east beyond which the curtain wall is double—having an inner skin which may have been an after-thought; the unlit and inaccessible space between the two walls was roofed by a segmental vault carrying a platform or wall walk about 7 ft. wide. This walk connects the second floor of the gate-house to the first-floor room of block (D), where the doorway, now blocked, is clearly inserted and is the same design as those on the gate-house. There are traces of a raised terrace at the base of the wall, a sheltered position favoured with some direct sunlight.

The L-shaped block (E and D) to the left of the inner porch is the largest surviving part of the medieval building. In its north face can be seen the outline of the two blocked arched openings, which indicate that originally it was a gate-house of somewhat similar design to that south of the village of Llantwit Major. The form of the larger two-centred arch continues south inside the building forming a vault over the original entrance passage which is 8 ft. 9 ins. wide. The masonry now blocking this opening, and the three-light window it contains, date from the 16th century, when the back of the whole structure was largely rebuilt; but many internal features, such as a pointed doorway leading from the passage to the adjacent hall (block (A)) and the stone stairs, survive from medieval times. Sufficient remains to make it clear that the gate was never strongly defended and never part of a military establishment; a fact supported by the design of the projecting wing (D), in which no provisions have been made to defend the main approach. The ground floor of this, now inaccessible, is barrel-vaulted, badly lit and entered from the south. This is clearly added to the gate-house, yet as it contains some similar dressings, it is unlikely to be very different in date.

The arrangements on the first floor are complicated but are generally Elizabethan and include a fireplace and a fragment of decorated plaster-work of this period. A disused doorway led to a building which was replaced by the porch of 1600: in the N.E. corner an oblique passage has been cut to give access to the room over (D). This apartment shows some traces of the medieval arrangements, including the inner reveals of the original window which was narrower than the present Elizabethan one: east of this is the inserted door leading to the wall walk. This room was lit by two other small windows, one now blocked, and also contained two curious mural cupboards. Leading up around the back of a small fireplace of uncertain date, a narrow stone stair gave access to the attic room above and to a small latrine in the east wall.

The inner porch, probably the best of its kind in Wales, was built in 1600; it is a show-piece and an expression of the ebullient and flamboyant society of late Elizabethan and Jacobean days. This was a period when many great houses were embellished by porches or gate-houses, although it cannot be denied that many were noteworthy for their vulgarity alone. They were probably inspired by the engravings of Roman triumphal arches which appeared in several of the architectural copybooks published during the 16th century; yet these were rarely, if ever, slavishly copied.

Apart from the quality of its design and dexterity of execution, the porch at Beaupre is one of the most successful in its setting. Its fine detail is composed to form a strong vertical unit which balances the horizontal lines of the other building masses, and its jewel-like quality is further enhanced by its setting amidst the irregular fenestration and rough stonework of the adjacent buildings; but traces of external plaster indicate that all these buildings were once rendered with imitation ashlar courses matching the stone-work of the porch. Contemporary poets praised it, but it was left to the later writers to invent stories about its builders. In fact its designer is unknown, but certain details, including the three panels bearing the dated inscription, appear on the great porch at Kirby, and certainly point to a familiarity with the series of splendid Northamptonshire porches.

By 1600 many English examples were entirely classical in detail, but here the four-centred Tudor arch persists, although all the classical detail is extremely good and refined. It consists of three stages each embellished with the proper classical order—the emphasis being placed on the first floor where the main feature is a shield of arms with an elaborately undercut crest and mantling. The charges are:—(1) Basset (arg. a chevron between three bugle horns stringed sable). (2) De la bere (az. a bend cotised or between six martlets of the second). (3) Turbervill (chequy or and gu. a fess erm.). (4) Williams [Iestyn ap Gwrgant] (gu. three chevrons ar.). (5) Johns (ar. a chev. sa. between three ravens ppr a bordure invected gu. bezantee). (6) Bleddyn ap Cynfyn (or lion ramp. gu. armed—langued az.). Crest (a stag's head cabossed between the attires a cross fitchée at the foot ar.). This is badly weathered. Motto in a scroll beneath the shield

(G)WELL . ANGHAY . NA . CHWILY(DD)
 [Correct form: GWELL ANGAU NA CHYWILYDD
 (*Better death than shame*)]

The arms are flanked by two pairs of small cartouches, all but the bottom left containing a small circular blank panel; the exception is square and could be removed from inside to form a peep-hole—the

inner opening of this can be seen clearly on the inside. At a lower level are three inscribed panels bearing the following verses cut in Roman capitals:—

SAY: COWLDST THOVE
VER FYND, OR EVER HEA
RE, OR SEE: A WORDLY WRET
CHE, OR COWARD PROVE

A FAYTHFVLL FRYNDE
TO BEE RYCHARDE
BASSETT, HAVING TO(W)YF
KATHERINE DOVGHT(E)R TO

SIR THOMAS IOHNS KNIGHT
BWYLT THIS PORCHE WITH
THE TONNES IN.ANO. 1600
HIS YERES . 65 . HIS WIFE . 55

The author of the couplet occupying the first six lines of the inscription is not known, and its relevance or significance is obscure, although it might be considered similar in sentiment to the family motto.

The rather odd and inconsistent spelling is not unusual for the period. The word TONNES in this context means chimneys, although there appears to be no record of the use of this word in contemporary Anglo-Welsh literature. The fact that a Welsh scholar of repute who was a native of the area unwittingly interpolated the word CHYMNYE in a copy of the inscription he made in 1803, implies that it must have been a local term at that time. The most reasonable explanation is that the large chimney to the right of the porch was originally capped by an impressive tall stack probably of similar quality to the porch, although there is no material evidence of its existence. The appearance of the chimney as it now stands is odd and truncated, and clearly it could never have worked satisfactorily without being continued up to the ridge level.

The third stage is dominated by a large eight-light transomed window which is now blocked; the pitched roof was masked by a scrolled gable. The porch now has a modern concrete roof but is without floors; most of the internal plastering has fallen away revealing that the main structure was of brick.

The interior of the ground floor has stone benches against the side walls which are carefully lined with thin stone slabs grooved to

emulate the rusticated courses of masonry. Their smooth surface has attracted many initial carvers, and there is a selection of graffiti, the earliest being 1644; the range includes a few more of the 17th century and several of the 18th.

On the stage above, the plaster by the peep-hole window, already mentioned, contains some interesting drawings and graffiti. Immediately above the opening is a drawing which probably represents a 17th-century pinnacle of about 200 tons. Eight guns can be seen, but some faults in the rigging suggest that this was not drawn by a seaman. The fact that the St. George's cross is at the main mast, and not the Union flag as ordered in 1606, should indicate a date a little earlier than this, but the artist may not have known of this rule. (See illustration inside front cover). Other graffiti include the names Thomas and Rob Williams with the date 1632. Two curious triangular shapes resembling profiles of ships' hulls are far too slender to be accurate representations of 17th-century vessels.

The porch gives direct access to the hall ((A) on plan). It is roofless and without floors, with much of the walling medieval; yet what detail survives is of the later period. This includes its only window, of six unusually slender mullioned lights set in the south wall, and the doorway and fireplace in the wall opposite. Several problems are presented here as the original plan seems to have been unorthodox. The hall clearly butted against (E) from which it was entered, and cannot be much later, as high up in the S. wall there is a fragment of a window *in situ* of the same moulding as in (D). In the side walls can be seen the outline of four tall windows which could have contained tracery of 14th-century design. A fireplace, of which fragments remain in the N. gable, was destroyed to give access to (B), a break which must have taken place around 1600 as the existing fireplace in the north wall is, as already stated, probably coeval with the porch. This fireplace has an elaborate lintel decorated with carved shields which may have been painted; its mantel-shelf of Quarella stone appears to be re-used. The entrance from the porch leads to the site of the screens passage with another door traditionally placed at the opposite end still with its carved wooden lintel *in situ*. On its east side it is still possible to trace some of the medieval arrangements, including a stone cupboard or buffet flanked by arched doorways. Only the south one is now open and this leads to the main entrance passage; the other was also connected to the entrance and to some buildings which were swept away when the porch was built. Above these openings a plain door led to a gallery over the screens passage, which also gave access to the first floor of the porch; it was carried on stone corbels which are still to be seen and presumably on the wooden posts of the screen.

At the opposite end of the hall is the west block (B) which originally had three floors each forming a single well-lit room with a fireplace. Its north wall contains the remains of a small stair and it is possible that part of an earlier structure is incorporated.

To the north of this is block (C), the largest of the 16th-century additions. It contains the principal stair—an unusual structure formed round a central square stone newel. Some of the lower steps of stone have survived but the upper parts which were of wood have perished. Beyond this lay a tier of four large rooms lit with windows to the west and east and with the exception of the basement all provided with fireplaces. Against its north gable is an impressive battery of latrines serving all floors except the cellar. The channel was flushed by a system of well-built stone conduits flowing down from the east and south. Further to the north and the junction of the courtyard wall a number of lesser buildings have been contrived, but at the extreme north, standing forward of the courtyard wall, is a very puzzling small tower. It was once fitted with crenellations matching the wall, yet it was clearly not designed for effect alone. It is cut by a vaulted passage at the north, but apart from one tiny drain at floor level there is no other opening or means of access to the interior other than from the top. Probably it was used as a store or game-larder.

The other buildings are not open to the public, but do incorporate medieval fabric. These include a small pointed and blocked doorway in the front of the house, and a fine 14th-century two-light transomed window in a building beyond the garden which can be seen from the hall; now either much altered or ruined and overgrown, the remains suggest a medieval establishment of considerable size. Of this period too is the fine, now roofless barn to the south-east of the farm. There are also traces to be seen of Elizabethan gardens and in the valley to the west are the remains of fishponds recorded as having been made and repaired by William Basset in the mid-16th century.

GLOSSARY

<i>Ashlar</i>	Squared block(s) of dressed stone.
<i>Barrel Vault</i>	Vault with semi-cylindrical roof.
<i>Crenellation</i>	Battlements and loopholes.
<i>Fenestration</i>	Arrangement of windows.
<i>Four-centred</i>	Arches composed of circular arcs struck from four different centres.
<i>Mullion</i>	A vertical upright of stone or wood dividing a window opening.
<i>Newel</i>	The central post in a staircase.
<i>Reveal</i>	Internal side surface of a recess, especially of a doorway or window-opening.
<i>Segmental Vault</i>	A vault in which the arc was struck from a centre below the springing line.
<i>Transome</i>	A horizontal bar of stone or wood dividing a window opening.
<i>Vault</i>	An arched roof of brick or stone.

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