

CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

LISTED BUILDING	Oxwich Castle, Oxwich, Swansea
Grade:-	I
Date of Notification:-	06.09.52 amended 29.10.99
National Grid Reference:-	SS 4978586290
O.S. 1:10,000 Sheet No.:-	
CADW Reference No.:-	11530
C & C of S Reference No.:-	LB:022

Notes:-

Location:-

On high ground 0.5km south of Oxwich village.

History:-

Fragments of an earlier structure on this site, incorporated into the later north-eastern range, have been tentatively identified as a trade of the mediaeval castle but essentially the present building is of the Tudor period. Alternatively, a vestige of a tower 150m to the north-east (S.A.M. GM472(SWA)) may indicate the pre-Tudor castle site. The castle was in the ownership of the de la Mere family down to the C13. It came to the Penrice family and thence before 1459 to the Mansel family who rebuilt it. The Mansels have been described as belonging to a powerful gentry class whose lifestyle resembled that of past feudal magnates.

The castle was described by Merrick in 1578 as lately re-edified or repaired by Sr. Ed: Mansel, kt. And the same writer identifies Sir Rice Mansel as builder of the earlier part. The interpretation placed on this by the Royal Commission was that the south-eastern range was built by Sir Rice Mansel in the 1520s or 1530s, and the north-eastern range (with great hall and long gallery, plus a tower to the east) was added by his son Sir Edward Mansel in the 1560s or 1570s. This has, however, been challenged, on the basis of structural evidence. The castle ceased to be occupied by the Mansel family in c1630 and the north-eastern range and east tower then fell into disrepair. The south-eastern range was formerly one storey higher than it is now. The castle is now in the care of Cadw. The south-eastern range is roofed and a modern staircase and custodian's office have been inserted. The other parts are consolidated ruins.

Exterior:-

The castle courtyard is entered at the south-west side by a small gateway between blind rounded piers across which a high arch spans. The gateway contains a four-centred arch with sunk spandrels in local Sutton stone and above that a square sunken armorial panel (Mansel quartered with Penrice and Scurlage) including the initials of Rice Mansel, in oolitic limestone. The high arch is slightly chamfered at the front and there is a machicolation-slot at its rear and a parapet walk as if for defence of the gate. To the right of the entrance is a semi-circular tower, with two small Tudor windows; a similar tower probably existed originally to the left of the gate to complete the symmetry. The masonry apart from the carved work is local rubble or axe-dressed work, with many surviving putlog holes. The courtyard is square, with a low modern wall to the north-west side returning to the south-west side up to the entrance. Only part of the courtyard is

paved. The more impressive part is the north-east range, surviving to almost eaves height on the side facing the courtyard but reduced to the level of the undercroft vaults on the outer side and internally. Local limestone rubble with sandstone stone dressings to openings. In front is the exposed foundation of the staircase building which gave access to the Great Hall. Five windows of the Long Gallery survive partially at the top, occupying the full length of the range. One window of the hall remains, its rear walled up: it consists of three tiers of diminishing lights, with thicker and thinner mullions dividing its horizontally into three groups of two lights. Above it is a relieving arch, and the surviving jamb of a similar window but of four tiers in height, the latter window fully walled up. Beneath these to left is the hall doorway, now walled up, with a segmental arch. To the left is an area of four common storeys (not counting the Long Gallery) with three surviving two-light Tudor windows on the front elevation (one walled up). Ten small windows in what remains of the return north-west elevation, vertically staggered as some were lights to staircase landings. There is a Tudor arched undercroft entrance to the left of the site of the stairs block in the yard elevation, and two segmental-headed undercroft windows to the right, one walled up: square-headed doorway adjacent to the south block, slightly angled. There were three tower-like projections on the north-east side. To the south-east side of the courtyard is the lower range, consisting now of a two-storey four-window range, slate roofed. Restored Tudor windows above, three of four lights and one of two; label moulds with saltire terminations. One similar two-light Tudor window to the ground storey, but with no label, at the right; four-centred door arch beside this: three sash windows and a modern entrance with porch. The sash windows are in old openings, over which there are label moulds with saltire terminations. This block has a gable elevation to the south-west showing a two-light Tudor window with label in the attic, and a sash window below at first storey. Lateral chimneys and small rear wing (formerly a bakehouse) with end-chimney. The south-east elevation of the east tower has six storeys of Tudor windows with label moulds, of one or two lights with mullions and in some cases ransoms. The architectural dress of this sun-lit elevation shows that it was to be seen to good effect from Oxwich Bay. The north-east elevation of the latter block has similar windows but without labels.

Interior:-

The north-east part has the base of a staircase in straight flights around a core of masonry to the left, with a vaulted kitchen adjacent. To the right of these are two undercroft vaults, with a mural staircase to the entrance passage above. In the inner face of the south-west wall at second storey level is a fireplace with stone-frame cupboards each side. In the south-east part there is a kitchen at the left, now the custodian's room with visitors' stairs, a middle room, and two inner rooms to the right: lateral fireplaces to middle room and kitchen. The doors from the middle room to the inner unit indicate the latter was subdivided two rooms. One has a chamfered stone frame with diagonal stops. The upper storey is reached by a newel stair in the round tower, entered in the south corner of the yard. There are fireplaces also at first floor level. Timber-framed partition.

Listed:-level is a fireplace w

Listed at Grade I as an Elizabethan prodigy house of national importance to Wales. Scheduled Ancient Monument GM043 (SWA).

Reference:-

P Davies, *Historic Gower* (1997) pp. 55-56

B Morris. Which came first, the farmhouse or the Hall? *Gower* =XLIII (1992) pp. 42-47

J Newman, *Glamorgan (Buildings of Wales, 1995)* pp. 481-3

RCAHM Inventory, *Glamorgan IV pt. I The Greater Houses* (1981) pp.63-76

D Williams, *Gower – A Guide to the Ancient and Historic Monuments, Cadw* 1998