

GLASTIR ADVANCED

POST VISIT ASSESSMENT

**DAT REPORT 105834**

**Site Name: National Botanic Gardens of Wales,**

**Middleton Estate Park Wall**

**PRN 105766**

**NGR SN 5261 1878**

**Introduction and historic background**

The Dyfed Archaeological Trust (DAT) were consulted by Glastir contract officer Will Steele regarding the repair a section of the Park boundary for the former Middleton Estate now the National Botanical Gardens of Wales under Option 677 Repair of Masonry. The estate was subject to a Tir Gofal HE2 assessment in 2006 (TG W/12/0588 Report No. 2006/61).

The Extent of the former estate and thus the wall is included within the Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in Wales Grade II (Cadw; ICOMOS 2002). Guidance and consent is required from Cadw for works within the registered area.

Park Wall

The park wall encloses an area of c.235ha. of the late 18th century Middleton Hall Estate. It has been suggested that the park, in common with many others, adapted and enlarged an earlier deer park. The section of park wall subject to the proposed works extends for some 230m along the NNW part of the circuit and runs alongside the public road for part of its length. The wall is built of angular stone rubble construction laid in rough courses bonded with lime mortar. It varies in height between about 1.20m and 2.1m. No particular style of distinctive wall capping was noted here or elsewhere on the wall circuit. The completeness and condition of the wall varies along its length. Some sections are complete, standing to full height and essentially stable, some sections are entirely collapsed and some sections are in damaged condition by bowing out or slumped face stones. One collapsed section has been adapted into a gateway. Along most of its length the wall is covered with significant amounts of ivy and other plant growth and although the wall seem in reasonable condition the extent of vegetation cover will have dislodged or loosened the wall heads.

Park Wall Statement of significance

In spite of the damage identified above much of the wall is in generally good condition and its course is intact. In addition it survives as a significant landscape feature. It is an integral part of the form and functions of the former Middleton Estate the value of which is nationally recognised through its inclusion within the Register of Parks and Gardens.

The proposed repairs to the park wall are to be welcomed as they are necessary for the long term survival of the structure. In addition where the wall is adjacent to the public highway, which also carries National Cycle Route 47, it has a high amenity value and is important for understanding the position of the deer park as a landscape feature

Every effort should be made to arrest any further damage and to repair the existing failed areas.

Historic Environment Issues

Due to funding restrictions the full restoration/rebuild of the wall to full height for the whole length is not tenable. A number of options have been discussed to maximise the best restoration options available.

It has been suggested that as a possible Deer park boundary the wall should be restored to full height to reflect that function. DAT consider that the priority is the restoration of the wall as a boundary in the landscape as its function as deer barrier is secondary to defining the edges of the estate.

* In order to maximise its value as a landscape feature the preferred approach is to ensure that the full length of the wall subject to works is clearly visible and understandable. Where the wall has collapsed completely it needs to be rebuilt to a height of 1m. The section used as gateway can be excluded from this as its breach represents an episode in its history.
* Where the wall is bulging or leaning, especially adjacent to the highway, the masonry needs to be assessed and stabilised.
* Where facing stone are failing they should be re-set.
* Where the wall has partially collapsed to 1 m or higher the wall heads can be stabilised at that height

Where there are exposed wall tops either through partial re-build or collapsed height as found soft capping could be considered to protect the wall heads. This has the benefit of being identifiable as repair; is reversible and allows for later and continued rebuild of the collapsed areas; and helps to maintain the rustic “green” appearance of the wall as it is today.

One suggestion has been to reduce the wall height in some areas (citing health and safety concerns as the wall is next to a road) and using some of that stone to help rebuild other more broken down areas.

* Partial demolition is not normally considered acceptable in building conservation. DAT does not support such an approach.

It has been suggested that the ivy and vegetation on the wall be left for aesthetic reasons and for wildlife habitats.

* DAT are content for this to take place. Excessive vegetation cover can be detrimental but once removed it can expose damaged joints which will need to be re-pointed immediately.
* However any shrub vegetation with woody stems needs to be removed as its continued growth can prise apart masonry bonds.

A full photo record needs to be made of the wall during the different phases of work.

Huw Pritchard

DAT Heritage Management Archaeologist

19/02/2014