

Ash Hall, Ystradowen

Ash Hall first appears on an estate map of 1745 as part of the estate of Matthew Deere who, it is believed, built the first house on the site. The map shows a modest four-square residence fronted by a number of garden enclosures (Green court, Flower garden and Kitchen garden) and protected on the north and east by ornamental woodland and plantations

In the late eighteenth century Ash Hall was occupied by Colonel Richard Aubrey, a member of the Llantrithyd family, and he is credited with improving the surroundings of the house. According to the antiquarian Benjamin Heath Malkin, writing in 1803, Aubrey 'without any ostentatious display inconsistent with the dimensions of the homestead has brought his



grounds into a state of cultivation and beauty, far beyond what they possessed when I first knew them, by the judicious application of moderate labour and expense'. Malkin goes on to make the interesting observation that Aubrey had 'disencumbered' the lawn of 'those stone fences, by which it was formerly the custom of this country to shut out the beauties of the surrounding scenery'. It seems that Aubrey had done little to improve the house, for Malkin describes Ash Hall as one of the most desirable places in the county 'on a small and unaffected scale', a description which matches the farmhouse-like structure depicted on the 1745 map.

A succession of owners and tenants came into possession of Ash Hall in the nineteenth century and the house was rebuilt on an altogether more impressive scale. In 1840 Ash Hall was described as 'a gentlemanly abode' with spacious and elegant accommodation, a range of outbuildings and park-like grounds. Further improvements to the house were made later in the century and in 1866 the property was purchased by the wealthy businessman Daniel Owen. The Owen family lived at Ash Hall until the 1920s, and during the First World War the house was used as an Auxiliary Hospital. Photographs taken at that time show roses climbing over the verandah on the front of the house and a large Monkey Puzzle tree on the front lawn, and memories of a rose garden and shrubberies were recalled many years later by a member of the Owen family whose childhood was spent at Ash Hall.

Today there are some survivals from the past in the grounds of Ash Hall. A few Sweet Chestnut trees, probably planted in the eighteenth century when such trees were particularly fashionable and possibly depicted on the 1745 map, still line the drive. The walled kitchen garden on the north-east side of the drive probably formed part of the improvements made by Richard Aubrey towards the end of the eighteenth century, and vestiges of the later rose garden and shrubberies are still discernible.

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