



British Archaeological Association

Margam Park: A Story of Continuity

Saturday 21 May 2022



Margam Park, detail from a late seventeenth-century topographical painting (© National Museum of Wales)

Nicholas Carlisle, compiler of an early nineteenth-century topographical dictionary of Wales, observed that Margam 'is situate very pleasingly under the shelter of a lofty Hill and luxuriant Woods'. Two hundred year later, visitors to the 850 acres designated as Margam Country Park will find his description remains perfectly apt. The park itself, along with its mountainous hinterland, is a landscape of outstanding historical importance, featuring an impressive range of archaeological, sculptural, and architectural features spanning several millennia.

Of particular note, Margam was the site of a medieval Cistercian abbey, one of the largest in Wales. Much of the nave of the abbey church survives, whereas parts of the monastic buildings were adapted to become a secular residence for the Mansels, one of the leading gentry families in the new Tudor county of Glamorgan. The Mansel house was dismantled at the end of the eighteenth century, when the Margam estate became a 'pleasure ground', dominated by a vast neo-Classical orangery. As the wheel of fortune turned once again, in the 1830s an impressive Picturesque mansion — Margam Park — was built at the site by the young Christopher Rice Mansel Talbot, who was to become the richest commoner in Wales.

Programme (Led by David Robinson)

11.30 The day will begin at approximately 11.30, beginning near the ticket office to Margam Park (<http://www.margamcountrypark.co.uk/>)

For those travelling from London, there is an 08.48 from Paddington, arriving at Port Talbot Parkway at 11.11 (transport to Margam Park will be arranged)

11:45 Introduction to Margam Park

12:00 Margam Stones Museum (by courtesy of Cadw); a collection of inscribed and sculptured stones from the locality, notably from the 6th to the 11th centuries

1.00 LUNCH BREAK (members and students are advised to bring a picnic lunch)

1.30 Cistercian Margam: The Nave of the Abbey Church; a rare 12th-century survival, also featuring a group of superb early 17th-century tombs of the Mansel family

2.30 Cistercian Margam: The Monastic Ruins; including the early 13th-century chapter house

3.15 The Mansel House; imagining the Tudor and later structure, 16th to the 18th centuries

3.45 The Orangery; designed by Anthony Keck and built 1786–90, the largest structure of its kind in Britain

4.00 Margam Park (Castle); a vast Picturesque creation of the 1830s, designed by Thomas Hopper for Christopher Rice Mansel Talbot

5.00 Day Ends

For those returning to London, there is a 17.47 from Port Talbot Parkway, arriving London Paddington at 20.11 (transport back to the station will be arranged)

The study day will be limited to a maximum of 20 people: 10 members of the Association and 10 students. For members of the Association, the fee is £25 (please bring a cheque or cash with you on the day). Students do not have to pay a fee and their travel expenses (up to £50) will be reimbursed by the Association.

To register for the day: email studydays@thebaa.org by 1 May. We will notify you of the outcome by 2 May.