



# ST DONAT'S CASTLE // UWC ATLANTIC

FILM LOCATION BROCHURE









## HISTORY

St Donat's Castle has a long and varied history and has been continuously occupied since it was first built in the late 12th century – probably unique in Wales.

The castle is protected by two concentric curtain walls on a steep spur overlooking a deep valley close to the town of Llantwit Major. It is situated on the coast giving impressive views over the Bristol Channel.

The earliest surviving parts of the castle date from about 13th century (defensive walls, Mansell and Gun Towers).

The Stradling family, who occupied the castle for over 440 years, made substantial extensions to the interior rooms. The earliest work – the Great Hall and Priest's Room – date from the late 15th Century. The strategic Gibbet Tower in the north was also constructed in this period.

Most of the other buildings and accommodation around the inner courtyard were built during the sixteenth century.

Architecturally, the castle was little altered in the 18th and 19th centuries after the Stradling male line was extinguished in 1738. However, since then, two later owners, Morgan Williams 1901-1909, and especially William Randolph Hearst 1925-1951 carried out extensive modifications and reconstruction to make the castle what it is today.

Today, St Donat's Castle is home to UWC Atlantic – a residential boarding school for over 380 international students. Hire fees of St Donat's Castle directly support the financial sustainability of the College which is a registered charity.



# OUTER GATEHOUSE AND PORTCULLIS

Built of local limestone around 1300 by the first Stradlings.

A dry moat extended on both sides around the outer wall although now filled-in on the north side. Access was originally over a drawbridge until the sixteenth century.

The Stradling coat of arms is mounted above the portcullis gate. Behind it are two heavy and very old wooden doors. Above the gate is a chute which would have been used to drop missiles over any attackers. The mechanism for raising the portcullis can still be seen in gatehouse with lancet windows either side of the chute.





# INNER COURTYARD

The courtyard is enclosed by series of buildings mostly dated from the Tudor period. The earliest date from before 1500 including the Great Hall built after the Henry VII ascended to the throne in 1485.

A bell-tower can be seen above the crenellations on the north-eastern range. Below that is a small oriel window behind which is the Priest's Room with panelling taken from the Neptune Inn in Ipswich.

The north range housed the ornate bedrooms of Hearst and his film-actress companion, Marion Davies. A hidden door gave access to a passageway to her room.

Below the bedrooms on the ground floor is the Lloyd George suite reserved for the former Prime Minister during his visits.

The west range, restored by Morgan Williams, incorporates three bays which project into the courtyard. The rooms behind the range were substantially altered by Hearst to include a magnificent banqueting hall, library and an attic suite.









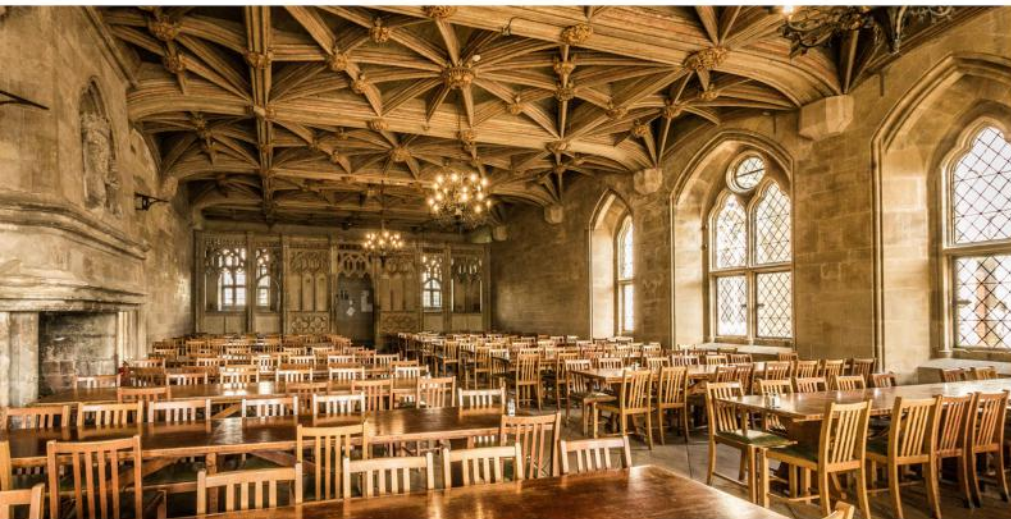


## DINING HALL

The present spacious room was completely rebuilt by Hearst after 1925 and is an outstanding example of the reconstruction work that Hearst commissioned.

The hall is now at right angles to the former dining room and drawing room and projects beyond the outer wall which had to be demolished to accommodate its length. It also includes a 15th century stone Gothic screen, found in the walls of a house in Bridgewater, Somerset and divides the hall from the entrance.

The hooded fireplace came from Beauvais in Normandy, and bears the royal Valois coat of arms of three fleurs-de-lis. But the real treasure is the ceiling which is 16th century Flemish and came from the nave of St. Botolph's Church, Boston, Lincolnshire.

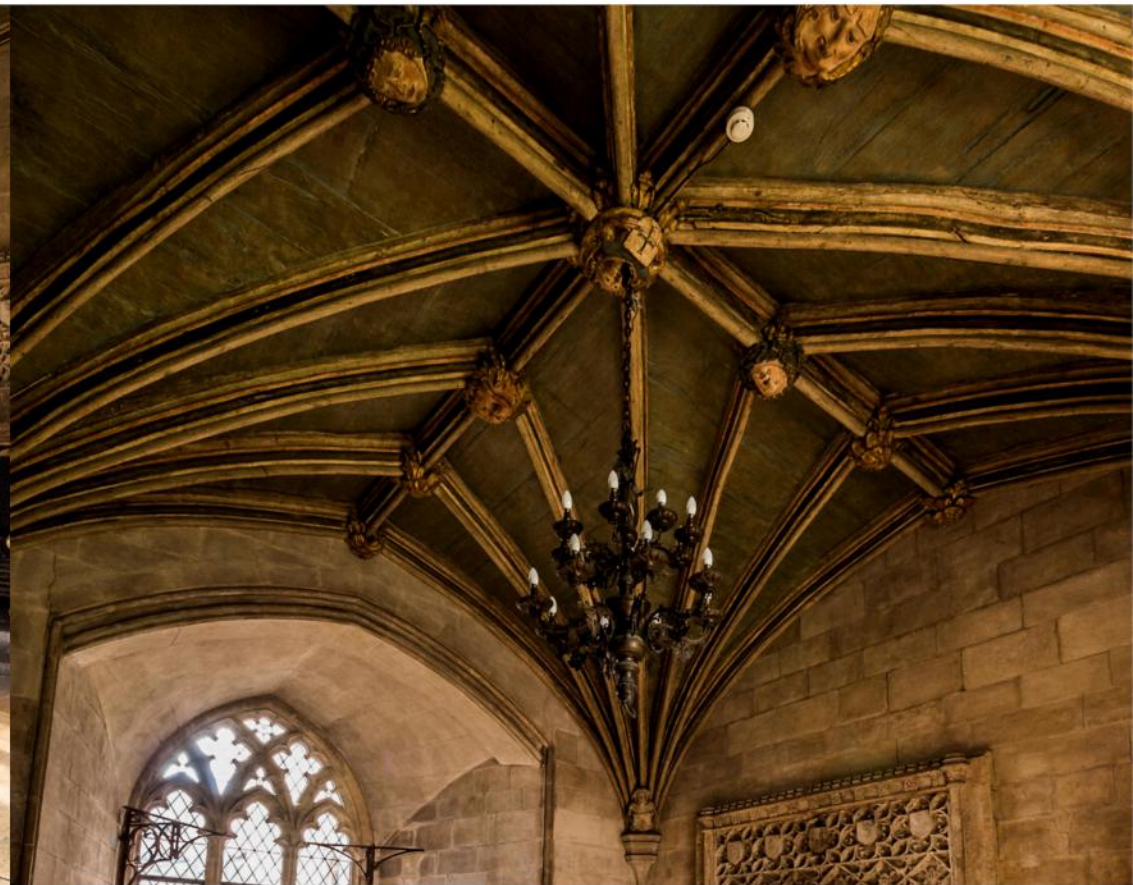




# BREAKFAST ROOM

This was Hearst's private breakfast room. The ceiling is another piece taken from St Botolph's Church. The ornate stone fireplace was originally in the Prior's lodging in Bradenstoke Abbey in Wiltshire.

The Gothic window looking out onto part of the inner curtain wall was added by Hearst.





# GREAT HALL

Dating from after 1485 and built against the thick inner curtain wall, the Hall was the largest assembly room in the castle before the time of Hearst.

The high timbered ceiling incorporates Tudor roses carved into the longitudinal beams. The fine screen and gallery above were renovated by Morgan Williams after the original was destroyed by fire.

The window opposite the fireplace was also restored in the early 20th century with the addition of stained glass featuring four heraldic shields; the one on the middle-left is of Iestyn ap Gwrgant, the Welsh prince of Morgannwg at the time of the Norman invasion.

The fireplace is original with a fine example of a Tudor chimney piece. Believing it to be Victorian, Hearst's agents had it taken out. Fortunately, the pieces were found in the grounds and were recovered and restored by the College.

At the west end would have been the high table on a dais where the lord and lady dined which was lit by the impressive original window in the dais bay. The fine original arch separated the bay from the main part of the hall. The three arches in the west wall were also added by Hearst.

The College installed the glass screens which divide the Hall and the Gun Room.

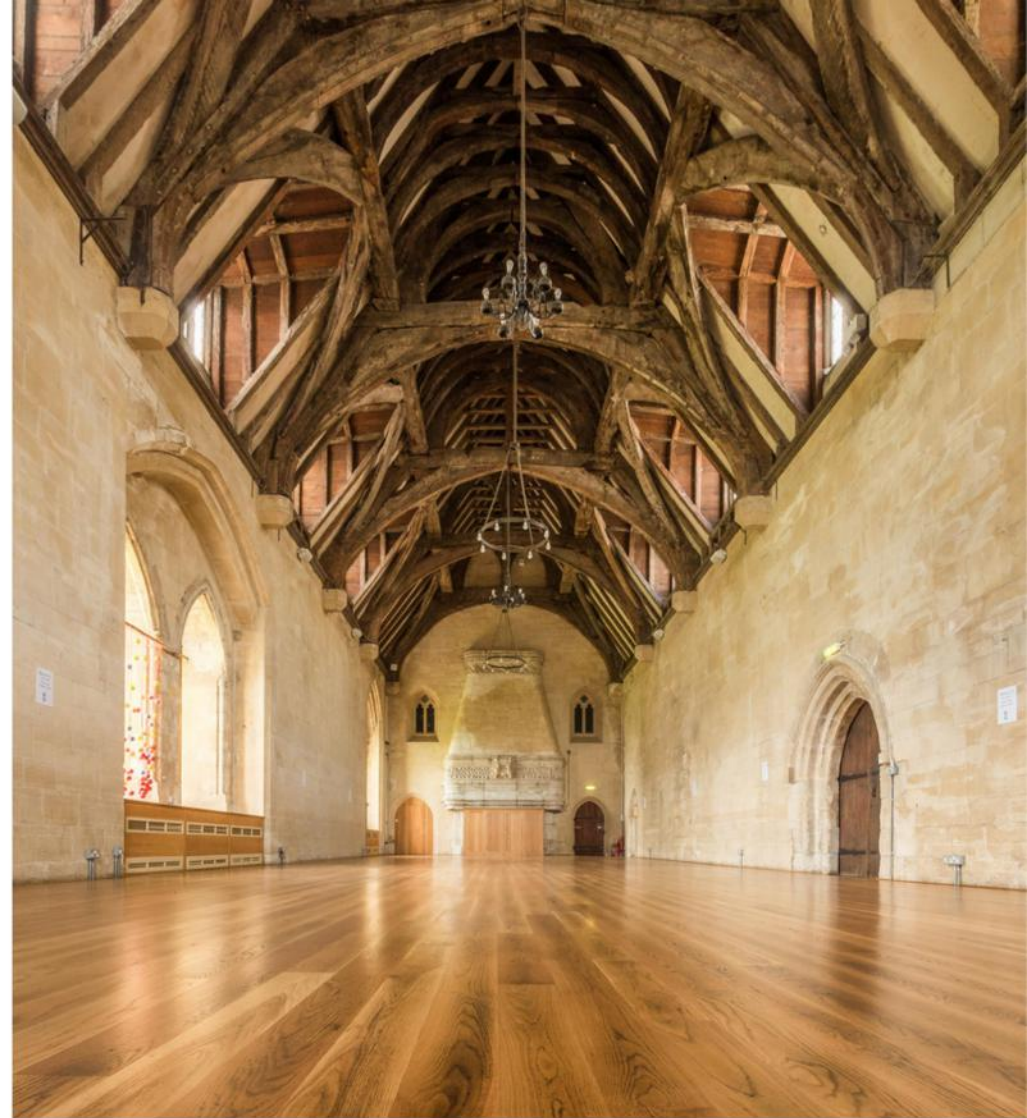




# BRADENSTOKE HALL

Probably the defining structure of the Hearst era. This magnificent hall, approximately 104ft long and 25ft wide was constructed in 1929, and incorporates a 14th century timbered beam roof and four Gothic windows which came from the partly ruined Bradenstoke Priory in Wiltshire.

The removal of these antiquities aroused great controversy. The story featured in newspapers, posters were displayed in the London Underground and questions were asked in Parliament so the pieces had to be transported to St Donat's under great secrecy.



The roof was installed between the inner and outer walls which were relined with ashlar but its length necessitated the demolition of part of the outer curtain wall at the eastern end of the hall. Both fireplaces are French dating from the 15th Century, the more striking of the two is at the west end.



## LIBRARY

Above the dining hall is the college library, accessible by a modern stone stairway.

The library incorporates a four-light window from the original apartment which was immediately above the window in the Breakfast Room below. Part of the library was used by Hearst to display his renowned collection of armour.

The linen fold panelling on the South end wall came from Ellenhall in Staffordshire. The origin of the gallery at the north end is not known, however, beneath it is a large wooden door surround consisting of standing figures under canopies either side of two-leafed doors, probably late mediaeval Flemish work, which came from a church in Lavenham (Suffolk).

There are two imported medieval fireplaces. The bust of Agatha Christie can be seen mounted on the west wall.

The library was recently refurbished thanks to a generous donation from the Agatha Christie Foundation whose grandson attended the College.





# HISTORY CLASSROOMS

The classrooms which lead from the library gallery were formerly two large bedrooms and a smaller bathroom with an attic in the north range of the castle and were installed by Hearst.



## LADY ANNE TOWER AND TOILETS

The tower stands at the south-west corner of the castle flanking the Bradenstoke Hall.

Originally built in the late 16th century, it was dilapidated and rebuilt several times, most recently by Hearst who enlarged it and also added another storey.

The rooms contain some richly decorated ceilings as well as a strange collection of Hearst's imports, the most unusual probably being the fireplace in the first floor room, which has a cut down hood resting on jambs from a different piece. Not all of Hearst's imports fitted their intended locations so some had to be cut down, or cobbled together. A stone spiral staircase leads down to the curious ladies' toilets in the basement of the tower. Although the provenance is unknown, the arched doorways give the appearance of medieval monks cells!



## HEARST ROOM

Hearst's bedroom in the first floor of the north range was richly furnished and decorated. The panelling was originally red and was saved from the Red Parlour, which had been situated at the North end of the ground floor of the West range and was demolished by Hearst.

This panelling had been one of the last additions made to the castle by the Stradling family (around 1700).

The ceiling incorporates elaborate plaster work, rather like the icing on a cake.





# STANLEY AND LLOYD GEORGE BEDROOMS

The Stanley room on the ground floor of the north range to the right of the entrance door was once Hearst's private dining room. It's thought that the panelling in this room came from Eyre Court Ireland.

The large deep baths in both rooms were finished with Italian marble and included an 'assistance bell button' on the wall by the side of the bath which can still be seen.

The Lloyd George room on the left was loaned to the former prime minister on his visits to Wales. Hearst and Lloyd George had a close but respectful relationship and the castle was used as a base when he received the freedom of Cowbridge in 1930 and when host, on Hearst's behalf, to members of the Gorsedd during the National Eisteddfod of 1934 which was held in Neath.









## TOP LAWN

The lawn lies in front of the imposing Bradenstoke Hall and Lady Anne Tower and was almost certainly restored by Hearst after the construction of the Bradenstoke Hall in 1929.

The lawn affords panoramic views of the Bristol Channel, terraced gardens, and an Italianate Summer House. Beyond the gardens is the former calvary barracks, built in the 16th century, and a swimming pool – installed by Hearst.

The 16th century Lady Anne tower, has been rebuilt several times most recently by Hearst.





# ROSE, BEAST AND BLUE GARDENS

The terraced gardens, dating from the 16th century, were originally part of a large park of fallow deer which sloped down to the sea. They were restored by Morgan Williams at the beginning of the 20th century and have been described as one of the finest Renaissance gardens in Wales. They are protected by windbreaks of yew hedges and stone walls which were also built around the late 16th century.

The gardening style with changing views down to the fifth terrace is Edwardian.

Stone steps lead to a Tudor or 'beast' garden with a set of heraldic emblems, called the 'Queen's Beasts', which were installed by Williams. An octagonal stone feature in the middle was probably part of a wellhead that can be seen on old drawings of the Inner Court of the castle.

Below this garden, on the fourth terrace, is a charming Rose Garden including a pavilion added by Hearst.

The Blue Garden on the last terrace has a long summer house (added by Hearst) with wisteria growing over it.







## JOUSTING FIELD

A long flat area stretching south from the church below the castle, now called the 'jousting field', was mentioned in writings dating from the late 16th century. (However, the original tournament and jousting field was under the area where the swimming pool now is.) Plans show that it was used as an orchard for a long time from the 17th century to 1843 or later. A stream was diverted to the western side of the valley to make a continuous field. There is a stone wall on the eastern side, high enough for fruit trees to grow against it, which leads to the churchyard.



# SEAWALL

The sea wall is thought to be of late 16th century origin, probably from the time of Sir Edward Stradling (1571-1609) who dammed the sea-inlet and was very active in the suppression of piracy in the Bristol Channel in the 1580s. What remains visible from this period formed part of the outer wall, but most of the surviving masonry is probably later 19th century from Dr.J Nicholl-Carne's time (1862-1901). The turrets and castellations were probably added by Hearst in the 1920s.



The wall was breached after a violent storm in 2007 revealing the 16th century wall behind. The college plans to establish a new Coast Guard Watch Station in one of the seafront towers.

The slipway to access St Donat's Bay is a part of the St Donat's Castle estate.





# ST DONAT'S CHURCH

St Donats Church as it stands today was begun by Normans around 1095.

There are a number of interesting features in the church. The circular font, with fish scale ornament around the top, is Norman. In the nave, a Tudor arch is over a small blocked up doorway; this is known as the 'soldier's door' through which it is said Oliver Cromwell's soldiers entered the church when they occupied the castle. Many of the stained glass windows in the church commemorate members of the Stradling family. There are also reproductions of three painted panels; one records the marriage of Sir Edward Stradling V whose mother was Katherine Gamage of Coity, (Bridgend) The original paintings were stolen but later recovered and are now in the National Museum of Wales. The church cemetery contains a monument over the grave of Dr. John Whitlock Stradling (formerly Carne) and his wife Mary.

But the most notable feature in the church is the impressive marble tomb of Sir Thomas Stradling, the last of the line, who was killed in a duel in France in 1738 which can be seen in the small Lady Chapel by appointment.

Hire of the church can be booked via St Illtud's Church, however, a fee must also be paid to UWC Atlantic for access and vehicle parking.





# TYTHE BARN (ARTS CENTRE)

Thought to be of medieval origins and possibly dating mainly from the later 16th Century, the building was once part of the St. Donat's Home Farm.

Both the barn and the lower extension on the south-east are depicted on an engraving of 1740.



The original arched openings, built for farm wagons, can still be seen but the large wooden doors are replicas of the original doors .

The barn was sympathetically repaired and converted into St. Donat's Arts Centre in 1973-1977 and is now used as a theatre.











An aerial photograph of a coastal landscape. On the left, a steep, green cliffside descends to a wide, light-colored pebble beach. The beach is bordered by a low concrete wall in the foreground. The sea is a deep blue-green, meeting the shore at a gentle curve. In the distance, a small white lighthouse sits atop a distant headland under a clear sky.

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References:  
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"St Donat's Castle" - Alan Hall  
"The Story of St Donat's Castle & Atlantic College" - Edited by Roy Denning  
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