

FAIRYHILL

Ref number	PGW (Gm) 49 (SWA)
OS Map	159
Grid ref	SS 467 912
Former county	West Glamorgan
Unitary authority	City and County of Swansea
Community council	Reynoldston
Designations	None
Site evaluation	Grade II

Primary reasons for grading The survival of a well preserved eighteenth- and mid nineteenth-century small park and informal wooded grounds. The entire layout survives, with remnants of an attractive water garden in the valley. The view from the garden lawn, across the well preserved ha-ha, to the tree-fringed park is exceptionally fine.

Type of site Small landscape park; informal woodland and water grounds

Main phases of construction Second half of eighteenth century; 1830s-50s

Site description

Fairyhill is a substantial two- and three-storey gentry house situated in the heart of the Gower peninsula to the north-west of the village of Reynoldston. It lies on level ground on the east side of the valley of the Burry Pill, which runs south-north. The house is reached by a narrow lane which runs north-south along the east boundary of the property, with the main entrance just to the south-east of the house.

The house faces south, with a three-storey, three-bay central block flanked by two-storey, single-bay extensions. It has pitched roofs, sash windows and is built of stone, the south front rendered and with Virginia creeper growing over it. The main entrance is on the east side, facing the small forecourt. Next to the west end is a wooden framed, pitched roofed conservatory, its west end standing on a brick base. The roof is of perspex. This abuts a single-storey, rendered, square building with a glass lantern at the top of the pyramidal roof. Against the west side is a flight of stone steps leading to a door into the building.

The early history of Fairyhill is unclear, but it is certain that by the early eighteenth century it had become the property of the Lucas family of nearby Stouthall. Then known as Peartree, it was lived in from *c.* 1720 by a younger member of the family, Richard Lucas, after his marriage to Barbara Bowen. Two of his children subsequently lived here, and in 1785 John Lucas, of Stouthall, took over the property.

He renamed it Fairyhill and lived here until 1787, when he returned to Stouthall on the death of his father. In 1813 Fairyhill was leased to Lady Diana Barham, from Kent, who spent much time, money and energy in the cause of establishing Methodism in the Gower. She instigated and paid for the building of the Bethesda Chapel at Burry Green nearby. On her death in 1823 the Lucas family again took possession and Henry Lucas lived here, together with his numerous racehorses, until debt forced him to sell the property to the Revd Samuel Phillips. Phillips ran through both his wives' dowries (his second wife being Juliana, Lady Barham's daughter) and died heavily in debt in 1855.

From 1858 to 1921 Fairyhill was in the hands of the Benson family, having been bought by Starling Benson, a mayor of Swansea. The Bensons were benevolent and generous owners, given to parties and 'sumptuous teas' at Fairyhill. It continued to be well maintained until the Second World War, but in 1947 it was bought by Mr E.H. Phillpotts, a market gardener, and the property fell into disrepair. Restoration was started in 1982 by Mr and Mrs Frayne and in 1984 Fairyhill became a hotel. In 1993 it was sold to the present owners.

A roughly rectangular gravelled service court lies to the north of the house. On the north side, against the south wall of the kitchen garden, is a former stable building, a single-storey rendered house, now a separate dwelling called 'The Stable'. On the north side is a two-storey house of rubble stone construction with a pitched roof and extending single-storey porch on the north side. This former outbuilding is now used as the residence of Fairyhill's owners.

A miniature landscape park, in essence an ornamented field, lies to the south of the house and garden. It occupies a square area, bounded on the east and south by stone walls along narrow lanes and on the west occupying the Burry Pill valley floor. However, although small, the layout and planting have been skilfully arranged to give a delightful, secluded and peaceful scene. The ha-ha, which divides the garden from the park, allows uninterrupted views across the lawn to the park and vice versa.

The centre of the park is open grassland, sloping gently to the south. This is fringed with belts of deciduous trees on all but the north side. At the south end are two pines and an oak, and towards the east side is a large poplar. On the west side of the open area is a large clump of mixed trees, including Douglas fir, oak, beech and ash, underplanted with rhododendrons. The belt along the east side has a curving outline and consists of mixed deciduous trees and a clump of rhododendrons. The belt at the south end includes beech, hazel and oak and within it a large earth bank runs east-west, stopping near the stream. The western side of the park, sloping down to the valley, is more open woodland, with some large oak and ash trees in it.

The ha-ha that bounds the park on the north side is well built of coursed rough blocks of stone, with a ditch on the south side. It begins in the woodland belt that runs along the east side of the park and runs straight westwards along the edge of the garden lawn, at the western edge of which, at the top of the slope down to the valley, it turns northwards and then runs north-westwards down the slope. In the valley floor it becomes a low wall, which is tumbled in places.

It is probable that the park originated in the second half of the eighteenth century and was the work of Richard Lucas or his son John. In style it dates from this period, and later owners, except possibly the high-spending Revd Phillips in the 1830s-50s, are unlikely to have had the inclination or money to lay out the park. Rhododendrons and conifers testify to later, nineteenth-century planting within the earlier framework. The 1878 Ordnance Survey map shows the park layout much as it

is today, except that there are more specimen trees, both deciduous and coniferous, in the open centre and the western side is more open, with woodland beyond the stream and a row of trees along the top of the slope to its east.

The garden and grounds lie to the south, west and north-west of the house. They can be divided into two main components, the garden to the south of the house and the woodland grounds in the valley to the west and north-west.

The main entrance lies to the south-east of the house, with incurving rubble stone walls and square, rendered gate piers topped with vases. There are no gates. A gravel drive curves north-westwards through a belt of woodland to a small forecourt on the east front of the house. This is backed by a stony earth bank.

To the south of the house is a level terrace, bounded on the west side by a low stone and brick revetment wall with flat stone coping. A concrete path runs beside the house and a gravel one parallel to it, with a strip of lawn, divided in two by a cross gravel path, between the two. A large, circular, stone planter, with rope moulding around the rim, stands on a square stone base cased in concrete on the western part of the lawn. At the west end of the gravel path is a flight of three stone steps, flanked by square stone piers topped with vases, leading down to a curving gravel path which runs into the woodland grounds. A gravel path running north-south crosses it just below the steps. To the north-west is a large, multi-stemmed Lawson cypress.

To the south of the main east-west gravel path the lawn continues southwards, with a slight drop half-way to the garden boundary to a levelled croquet or tennis lawn. The lawn is bounded on the south by the ha-ha, giving a fine and uninterrupted view across the parkland. To the east it is bounded by a belt of mixed trees along the garden boundary. These include sycamore, lime, beech, evergreen oak, pine and yew, with a fringe of rhododendrons. To the west there is a tongue of evergreen oak, pine and beech trees extending southwards along the edge of the lawn.

The second main area is the wooded grounds in the valley to the west of the house. The slope down to the valley floor is wooded with a mixture of mature trees, mainly beech, evergreen oak, sweet chestnut and Scots pine. One gravel path leads southwards to the ha-ha, where there is a modern concrete bridge over into the park; another winds through the woodland down to the valley floor. The stream and its environs have been landscaped into ornamental water gardens, but these are now mostly ruinous. Near the south end of the grounds is a small, roughly rectangular, enclosure of large stone blocks, with an entrance at the north end. This is either a ruined garden building or possibly some form of rustic seat, now in a ruined state. Nearby is a well next to a branch of the stream. It is small, stone lined, with a sill and step on the east side and a higher sill and low arch of large stones on the west. It is now silted up and has ferns growing on it. A channel leads from it to the stream.

The stream itself has been landscaped to form two islands. The upper, southern one, is the smaller and lies to the west of the park/garden boundary wall. The lower one runs northwards from a weir near the well. This has a concrete dam, below which a diversion channel running northwards creates an island to its west. At the beginning of this channel are the supports of a former bridge, standing on the south side, fallen on the north. Further north is a low arched bridge of cemented stones over the channel, at the foot of the path which descends from the house. The island is planted with beech and lime trees, with rhododendrons, and with a huge plane tree near its northern end. An unsurfaced path runs the length of it. At its north-west end is a ruined dam/bridge, its west half still intact, with a flat top. In the north-east corner a modern wooden bridge on stone supports crosses the diversion channel. Below it is a

lot of fallen stone in the stream, suggesting that the original bridge here was a stone one.

To the north a modern gravel track leads through woodland along the east side of the stream. Trees include large beeches underplanted with rhododendrons. The path passes a low east-west wall which extends westwards from the north end of the kitchen garden, which lies to the east. A modern wooden bridge over the stream leads to a grass walk around a shallow pond which lies parallel to the stream, to its west. The pond is reed-fringed, ornamented with islands, with willow and alder on its banks and backed on the west by large pine trees. The ground to the east of the pond and stream slopes up gently and is largely grassed, with a few young ornamental trees and a mature Douglas fir. To the south is a relict orchard.

The development of the garden and grounds probably parallels that of the park. The ha-ha bounding both park and garden would argue that they were contemporary and that the planting of the flanks of the garden so as to give the fine view out to the park dates from the same period. By the time of the 1878 Ordnance Survey map the garden had taken on its present form, with only minor alterations between that date and the present. These include the moving of the vase, shown on the map to the south, not north, of the east-west path, and further to the east. The map also shows some conifers along the top of the ha-ha, which would partly have obscured the view out to the park. The ornamental layout of the stream and its surroundings appears to have taken place by 1878 as the map shows the well, islands, paths, bridges and pond. The date of this part of the landscaping is uncertain; it may have taken place in the mid nineteenth century, during the occupancy of the Revd Samuel Phillips.

The walled kitchen gardens, former glasshouse range and relict orchard lie to the north of the house and service court. There are three kitchen garden compartments of unequal size. The southernmost two adjoin the service court. The largest lies to the north-west of the house, the southern half of its east wall being the west wall of the forecourt. A path leads through the garden, to the west of the house, to a wide opening in the south wall. The walls are of rubble stone construction, *c.* 2 -3.5 m high, with no coping. The interior slopes north and west and is mostly grassed over, with a flowerbed against the east wall and a log shed against the south. There is a gap at the south end of the east wall.

The second compartment, also with stone walls, is smaller and lies to the east of the first and north of the service court. It now forms the private garden to 'The Stables'. The third, rectangular, compartment is the smallest and lies to the north of the second. Its north wall is *c.* 3.5 m high, with pitched coping. It has a lean-to single-storey stone bothy with a slate roof built against it. The east and north walls are brick on a stone base; the west wall is stone in the lower half, with brick on top. At its south end is an entrance now blocked with brick. The south wall is of stone, *c.* 2.5 m high, with doorways at each end. To the west the continuation of the wall forms the north wall of the first compartment and then continues westwards down the slope, where it becomes ruinous, with a large hole near the east end. Next to it is a ravine with water flowing down it from a culvert under the kitchen garden.

To the north of the kitchen garden compartments is a grass area, with a wide entrance to the lane on the east boundary. To the north is a complex of ruined stone buildings, with a sunken 'basement' open at the east end. This is all that remains of extensive glasshouses, shown on the 1878 map. The pit probably housed the boiler. To the north is an open grass area with a few old fruit trees that is all that remains of an orchard, shown with rows of trees on the 1878 map.

Sources

Secondary

Information sheet on the history of Fairyhill, at the hotel.