

LLANDUDNO: HAULFRE GARDENS

Ref No	PGW (Gd) 11 (CON)
OS Map	115
Grid Ref	SH 775 826
Former County	Gwynedd
Unitary Authority	Conwy
Community Council	Llandudno
Designations	Part included in Great Orme's Head SSSI and Local Nature Reserve.
Site Evaluation	Grade II

Primary reasons for grading Remains of terraced garden on steep site originally laid out in the 1870s by Henry Pochin, with panoramic views.

Type of Site Terraced garden on very steep slope with views; woodland and semi-formal areas, with many paths; now publicly owned and a public park.

Main Phases of Construction 1871 - 1876; turn of nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Haulfre Gardens are situated on a very steep slope on the extreme north-west edge of the town of Llandudno. The house, Sunny Hill, is at the foot of the gardens, which clamber up the hillside behind it, on the south-east facing slope of the Great Orme. The house is a large nineteenth-century villa of a type very common in Llandudno, built on a platform cut out of the cliff - there is a sheer rock wall very close to the rear. The staff cottages were apparently built in 1865 so the house is probably of around the same date. It has a double-gabled front with decorative bargeboards and is rendered and painted white; the roof is slate. It has two storeys and an attic. It is now used as a cafe, and the small paved area beside it, probably formerly lawn, as a tea garden. The tarmac drive is short and straight, from the east corner of the garden along in front of the house to the cottages. Only one gate pier, of dressed stone with a moulded square top, remains at the entrance.

Nineteenth-century maps show a pair of cottages linked by sheds just south-west of the house. The copy of the 1911 Ordnance Survey map held in Gwynedd Archives is annotated by hand 'Gardener's House etc.'. In 1995 there was building work in progress and there appeared to be very little left on the site of one of the cottages, but now there are two apparently brand new

houses on the same site, with a sign saying 'Haulfre Gardens Cottages 1865 - 1995'. From this it seems reasonable to assume that the cottages were originally built in 1865, and demolished and completely rebuilt on the same site in 1995.

The map of 1913 shows glasshouses all along the back of the cottages and to the south-west, but these are not shown on the map of 1889 and they have now disappeared. As the cottages are, like the house, built on a platform blasted out of the rock, there seems little room for glasshouses at the rear, and also the site must have been shady; but the owner in 1903 grew many kinds of conservatory plants, including orchids, and the glasshouses may have been some sort of conservatory, perhaps utilising the natural rock wall at the back. This wall now looks fresh, as though it has been cut further back, and there is a modern rendered retaining wall on the top of it.

The site of the gardens is roughly rectangular, with the long axis running north-east to south-west, and the house lies near the east corner, with the main terraced area above it, on the north, and woodland and more terraces to the south and west. There is an excellent view of Llandudno from the house, which becomes ever more extensive as one goes higher up the garden; views from the highest levels are now obscured by trees but must once have been panoramic.

The gardens were originally designed and laid out by Henry Pochin, originator of the garden at Bodnant, between 1871 and 1876. Although Pochin bought Bodnant in 1874, and began improving the garden there soon afterwards, he was also rebuilding the house and appears not to have moved from Sunny Hill until 1876. The site is completely different from anything to be found at Bodnant, being steep, rocky, exposed to sun and wind and elevated, as well as very much smaller, and it is therefore particularly interesting to observe Pochin's response to two widely differing sites.

By 1900 the property belonged to Joseph Broome who, according to a 1903 article in *The Gardeners' Chronicle*, specialised in growing orchids and other glasshouse subjects. In 1889 there was already a large glasshouse on the terraces above the house, but by 1911 the area of glass had been more than doubled, presumably by Broome. This and other changes are well documented on maps, as an extremely detailed 1:500 Ordnance Survey plan of 1889 exists as well as 25-in. maps and larger-scale plans of 1911, 1913 and other dates.

Assuming that the 1889 map shows more or less Pochin's original design, the layout at first consisted of zig-zag paths up the north-east side of the garden, with a summer house part way up and another in the north corner, probably offering the best view; south-west of this, directly above the house, were a long, straight terrace with a large glasshouse and another summer house, and a slope planted with shrubs leading to a curved terrace above. Cutting across the curved terrace was an aviary, with some small terraced enclosures to the north and south which may have been used as a kitchen garden. Terraced paths ran along the slope through woods and shrubberies to the south-west. At this time the land to the west, now an area of woodland, did not belong to the property, or had not been developed, and was open heathland.

By 1911 Broome had enlarged the glasshouse and added more, near the cottages. He had added further terraces to the wooded slope above the main glasshouse, removed the aviary and completed the curved terrace, adding more terraces in the areas north and south of the aviary site. He had also created paths in the heathland area to the west, and added more paths and terraces in the south-western part. By this time there was also a long, narrow enclosure in the north corner of the garden, outside the original boundary, which may have been used as a kitchen garden.

The *Gardeners' Chronicle* description of 1903 mentions, apart from the many exotics grown under glass, roses, flowering shrubs, lilies and carnations, several rockeries with alpines, and areas of bedding. The garden is described as being divided up by hedges for shelter, wind being a problem.

The garden was subsequently acquired for the town, and was opened as a public garden by Lloyd George in 1929. The 'Invalids' Walk', a gently-sloping footpath down to the West Shore which runs along under the south-east boundary wall of Haulfre, now has an alternative first section passing through the gardens and out by a gate near the south corner.

Today the lowest part of the garden is probably still much as Broome would have recognised it, apart from the loss of the glass. Most of the structure remains throughout the garden, but here the paths are maintained and bedding schemes are still planted each year; there are flowering shrubs and fuchsias, perennials and wall shrubs. Higher up the slope, however, the woodlands are taking over, and some of the higher terraces are overgrown and paths in the western area are lost. None of the summer houses have survived, but the sites of two of them can be seen.

The gardens are intricately laid out with many terraces and paths. In the south-western part of the garden, the main paths, which are all shown on maps of 1911 and 1913, are the path now used as part of the 'Invalids' Walk', which runs along at the level of the drive, a walk along the top of the lawn below this, a tarmac path, with steps and rustic pole handrails, which zig-zags up the south-west side of the garden, and a path which branches off this and goes back to join the 'Invalids' Walk' not far from the cottages.

In the area to the west of the cottages, the path layout is not now the same as it is on the old maps and is even more complicated, with several short paths and flights of steps going in different directions. There are, however, several terraces with paths along, unsurfaced, grassy, or tarmac; one of these terraces holds the aviary, and the path is along the front. The handrails here are broken. Above the cottages, to the north-west, there are more terraces with paths along, the main one being original, from before 1889, with a wide path now surfaced with decaying tarmac, and a pole and wire fence along the edge.

Tarmac-surfaced paths run along below the glasshouse terrace, where some very large slate slabs set in the tarmac may be a dismantled water tank, and round the curved terrace. There is a zig-zag tarmac path with brick steps up the north-east side of the garden, which becomes

unsurfaced, with concrete steps, above the level of the curved terrace, leading into the north corner. This looks like a modern path but is shown on the 1889 map, leading to a summer house in the north corner; it may have changed its route slightly, and the handrails are modern.

Most of the paths in the wooded area to the west are lost or disused, but the main north-south path, which used to run just west of the wall dividing off this area, is still well used, and the wall has gone. The path leading north-eastwards off this one along the top of the garden, just below the probable kitchen garden enclosure, to the north corner where there is a way out to the open ground above, is also still used.

The 'Invalids' Walk' is not strictly part of the garden, but now that the garden is open to the public a more pleasant alternative is available for the first part of the route. The original path, which still exists and is tarmac-surfaced, runs below the high retaining wall along the south-east side of the garden, with a retaining wall of its own, topped partly with a stone parapet and partly with railings, on the other side; south-west of the garden it crosses the open heathy hillside down towards West Shore. A gate leading out into the same heathy area near the south corner of the garden makes it possible to begin the walk through the lowest levels of the garden, starting at the main entrance, and pick up the original path on the open hillside beyond. This is now the main and most-used path in the garden, and is tarmac-surfaced.

In the south corner of the garden, extending back almost half way along the south-east edge, is an enclosed area with a long, narrow, sloping lawn with terraced borders above and circular and diamond-shaped beds in the lawn. The lower edge is defined by the parapet of the retaining wall. There must once have been a good view out from here but it is now obscured by trees.

Steps lead into the garden at the north-east end and half way along the north-west side; there was clearly a path crossing from the latter to a small gate in the parapet, but this is now blocked and there is a continuous row of shrubs along in front of it and a tiny rockery over where the path ran. The rockery contains a shallow, circular concrete bird bath on a brick base presented by the West Denbighshire and Llandudno RSPCA.

The arrangement of the terraces is almost as complicated as the paths, and is to some extent the same thing as almost all the terraces have paths along, and some are so narrow there is room for nothing else. Most of the terraces have retaining walls around a metre high above and below; some are almost level but others, even though they may be narrow, still slope.

In the south-west part of the garden there is a long, terraced border at the back of the enclosed garden; because of the increasing slope, this is on two levels south-west of the central steps. Above the enclosed garden there is some new terracing but the one terrace in this area shown on the old maps does not seem to have survived. Going north-eastwards, there is an area of small terraces which was created between 1889 and 1911, and has been further modified since; an aviary has been added to one of these, probably since 1929.

North-westwards again is a longer, wider terrace shown on the 1889 plan, which once must have had a superb view, now cut off by trees. Narrowing, this continues along at the same level to a point above the house, where steps lead off to join the zig-zag path up the north-east side of the garden. Above it here is the most complicated terracing of all, with the site of the glasshouse and some fairly large terraces above, one curving, and above that two systems of smaller terraces side by side. The latter were built between 1889 and 1911, as were the terraces between the glasshouse site and the curving terrace, but the glasshouse terrace and curved terrace themselves date from before 1889. This area remains mostly open, while the area of smaller terraces above is mostly overgrown by trees and undergrowth spreading from the woodland to the north, and some young trees have also been planted on the terraces.

On the steep bank below the main terrace and above the house, there are signs of further small, disused terraces; there was also a path along here which is now lost.

There are two narrow terraces below the probable kitchen garden in the north corner, and possibly more above. One of the former carries a path and both are grass-surfaced.

The terrace walls vary in height and construction, but are mainly of mortared or dry stone. Some have niches for seats, and the positions of some of these do seem to correspond with small rectangles shown on the 1911 plan.

Along the south-east side of the drive, between it and the parapet of the retaining wall, is a wide, stone-edged border, with small trees, shrubs and bedding plants. This strip is shown as containing shrubs on the 1889 plan, but the stretch immediately in front of the house had none, so as not to block the view, and may have been grass. In the border is the gravestone of a cat, Ginger, who lived in the gardens from 1970 to 1982.

There are also two small stone-edged borders in front of the cottages in approximately the same positions as in 1889. East of the house site there is a border alongside a path retained by stone slabs on edge, but this is now too deeply shaded for planting.

The enclosed garden has a long terraced border at the top, and island beds in circle and diamond shapes in the lawn. Elsewhere borders run along the terraces next to paths, occasionally edged with stone. A small circular bed is shown on the 1889 plan between the house and the cottages, in what was probably a lawn (now the paved area next to the cafe), but there do not seem to have been any others at this time. The 1903 article in the *Gardeners' Chronicle*, however, mentions beds and lists various kinds of bedding plants.

The aviary, which is in a completely different place from the one shown on the 1889 map, was probably installed after the gardens were opened to the public, but is now disused. It is a long, narrow building made to fit the terrace on which it stands, not very substantial, and painted green, with wire-fronted compartments. The pre-1889 aviary did not contain a building, but was a fairly large enclosure. Near the entrance to the enclosed garden in the south corner is a wooden shelter, painted green, which was probably erected when the gardens were first opened to the public.

Three summer houses are shown on the 1889 plan. By 1911 one in the north corner had already gone. Another, below this, has now gone, with only its concrete platform remaining. The third was south-west of the glasshouse, at the same level, and was circular, with steps leading up to it and circling around it to the path above. Only the rear wall and tiled floor remain.

In Pochin's day large trees seem to have been mostly confined to the central and south-western parts of the garden, the main concentration being on the slope above the cottages. In this area some large specimens, including beech, Scots and other pines, cypress and ash may still be seen, some probably planted by Pochin. There are also smaller self-sown ash and sycamore. A little further north-east are some sweet chestnuts, limes and horse chestnuts.

In the south-western part of the garden, there is a steep grassy slope, towards the top of which there is so much rock it is almost a natural rockery. In 1913 this area was planted all over with conifers, and a small group of old twisted pines at the south-west edge are probably survivors of these. Other young conifers have been recently planted. In the 'rockery' area there is some gorse, and shrubs have been added. In the eastern part of the garden there are more old trees, not shown as individual specimens on the 1889 plan so possibly planted by Broome. These include beech, Scots pine and other conifers, and although there are a few shrubs beneath them this area is now very shady.

There is a row of planted trees in front of the probable kitchen garden to the north, and below these some younger flowering and ornamental specimens planted more recently on the terraces behind the glasshouse site. There is a much older cedar among these.

Many of the terraces have borders alongside the paths, and these are mostly planted with a mixture of perennials and flowering shrubs. The description of 1903 suggests that hedges were a feature of the garden, being used as protection from the wind. There are only a few today: in the enclosed garden there is a fuchsia hedge; a short privet cross-hedge to the north-east was probably planted as a wind-break, and nearby is some escallonia hedging. The beds in the lawn of the enclosed garden contain annual bedding around palm trees. There is a row of large shrubs (mostly laurel) and small trees along the south-east edge, within the wall, and a fuchsia hedge within this.

There is no kitchen garden as such now, but one is mentioned in 1903 and there is no other obvious explanation for the level area at the extreme north of the garden, now overgrown with trees and natural undergrowth. The walls have a retaining rather than a sheltering function, but create a level interior which is one of the largest level areas in the garden. The south wall is around 3 m high, one of the highest walls in the garden, and has a long-and-short top course. There may have been an attempt to create further terraces above the north, partly rock-cut, wall and there are disused paths along the top, with a small quarry above.

Before this area was constructed it is likely that the kitchen garden was located just to the west of the main glasshouse, where there were some wide, enclosed terraces which must have sloped fairly steeply. Further terraces were later added to these, making them narrower but more

level, and this could have marked the change to a different use. This area too is now almost completely overgrown.

Sources

Primary

Information from Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Sites and Monuments Record (PRN 4457)
Many twentieth-century photographs and postcards in Gwynedd County Archives (accession nos beginning XS/2352, /1948, /2224 and others)

Secondary

Gardener's Chronicle, 22 December 1900 (with illustration)

Gardener's Chronicle, 15 August 1903, pp. 115-15.

Llandudno Town Improvement Association, *Official guide to Llandudno* (1929)

Wynne Jones, I, *Llandudno, Queen of the Welsh Resorts* (1975)

A range of tourist guides held in the Gwynedd County Archives, Caernarfon.