

CRAFLWYN

Ref No	PGW (Gd) 21 (GWY)
OS Map	115
Grid Ref	SH 601 491
Former County	Gwynedd
Unitary Authority	Gwynedd
Community Council	Beddgelert
Designations	Snowdonia National Park
Site Evaluation	Grade II

Primary reasons for grading Nineteenth-century park and garden laid out probably as a whole, with good survival of plants; extensive plantations; good use of a steep hillside site.

Type of Site Ornamental garden with ponds, plantings of trees and shrubs in sheltered dell; two drives lined with trees; kitchen garden; orchard; woods.

Main Phases of Construction Nineteenth century

SITE DESCRIPTION

Craflwyn lies at the lower end of Nantgwynant, not far from Beddgelert, at the foot of a steep and rugged hillside - a very romantic setting. The house is built of brick, rendered and painted white, and is of two storeys, square, with a verandah on the north-east and south-east sides which runs into a conservatory (still containing a vine) on the south-west; it is in poor condition, although not derelict.

Most of the house visible at present was built by Llywelyn England Sidney Parry in 1877-78, shortly after inheriting the estate, but there may be an older core. The tower at the rear, in a completely different style, with Dutch gables, appears to be older than the main house and may date originally from as far back as the seventeenth century, although this is unproven and in some doubt. Craflwyn was a tenanted farm at the time and it is unlikely that such a fanciful structure would have been built. The first known mention of the tower dates from early in the twentieth century, so that it may in fact be later than the rest of the house rather than earlier. The date of 1411 over the door is a modern flight of fancy, added by the last owner, a former taxi-driver from Manchester who bought the estate after a win on the football pools.

The verandah, and wrought-iron balconies in front of some of the upper windows, give the house a slightly colonial air which is at odds with its mountainous setting,

and the contrast may well have been deliberate.

The property originally belonged to the Church, and after the Dissolution came by marriage into the hands of an influential family called Jones. In the seventeenth century it belonged to the Parrys, who were descendants of the Joneses. The Parry family had another house and let Craflwyn as a farm, apart from a few years early in the eighteenth century, when Humphrey Parry inherited the estate and briefly took up residence. It was not until the last quarter of the nineteenth century that Craflwyn was developed as a gentleman's residence with farm, park and gardens, albeit on a small scale, but its heyday was short-lived. Ll. E. S. Parry, who laid out the estate at this time, had no sons, and left the property to a distant cousin, who sold the house at the end of the nineteenth century, at the third attempt. A few years later it was sold again, to a Captain Higson, who died in 1921 but whose niece, Mrs Hinxman, lived at Craflwyn in the 1950s.

Captain Higson was a much-travelled bachelor soldier, who had served in the Boer wars; he was great collector of everything from birds' eggs to spears, and he brought plants home from the places to which he travelled, to the benefit of the garden. However, he patriotically felled and sold most of the timber during the First World War, including the row of trees along the west drive. After his death the garden suffered periods of neglect and although the area around the house was well maintained while Mrs Hinxman lived there, Craflwyn never regained its former glory. Most recently part of the house and the cottages have been used for holiday letting, and the park for a caravan/camping site.

There are two groups of outbuildings - a 'model farm', but without farmhouse and including some estate buildings, near the south-west gate, and a range including stables and some cottages directly behind the house. Due to the steepness of the slope there is no yard, and the rear branch of the drive, continuing along in front of the range, is partly tiled and clearly served this purpose. Craflwyn Cottage is the first building in the stable range, which is stone-built with slate roofs throughout, and appears to be contemporary with the present house. It is a small, two-storey house, with a central front door flanked by box hedges. The stables are single-storey, with a bell turret (minus bell) and weather vane on the top. The internal partitions remain in place and the floor is tiled. There is a separate loose-box at the end next to the house.

Next to the stables is a row of buildings which has been converted into holiday cottages by the addition of first-floor windows and the conversion of the lofts into upper floors; it is difficult to know how much they have been altered otherwise, but at least one seems to have been originally a single-storey cottage. Otherwise they may have been sheds/feed stores. The tack room, next in the range, is two-storey, with a spiral stone staircase to the upper floor, and is said originally to have been a small house, older than the rest of the buildings except the original main house. The track in front of this building and the cottages and carriage shed widens a little and is partly paved with small tiles; this is all there is by way of a stable-yard.

The cart/carriage shed is now almost open-fronted - the entrance has been widened and a modern RSJ put in, and there are now no doors. There is a door in the side of

the building, up some external steps, which would have given access to an upper floor. There are also some wall stubs which suggest a lean-to building has been demolished.

Another single-storey cottage, with its gable end to the track and a door in the middle of it, with tiny bay windows either side, has been converted from a small barn and has been recently used as a holiday cottage.

Most of the buildings of the model farm are still intact, although the function of some of them is now not apparent. They include a shippon with seven stalls (metal stalls and drinkers still in place, tiled floor with drain), the sawmill, with some gear still in position, small and large barns and three other buildings, two with tiled floors. All are basically stone-built, and are undergoing conversion. There was once a building against the sheer rock face opposite the main group of buildings, but only the side walls of this now remain.

In the plantation north of the farm and west of the path from it up to the garden is a long stone building with a walled compound in front. It seems to have been used most recently as a pheasantry, as it has pop-holes at ground level, but was probably converted from an old cottage or farm building pre-dating the plantation, as it also has normal window and door openings, some of which have been blocked up. It is now roofless, and there is no door.

The present park was laid out in the later nineteenth century at the same time that the house was built, and as the earlier house on the site seems only to have been a farm, it is unlikely that a park existed previously.

The park lies mostly to the south and east of the house, which is at the foot of a steep slope, facing south-east towards the Afon Glaslyn. There are also extensive plantations on the hillside behind. These are based on natural oak woodland to which conifers have been added. Sweet chestnuts are planted around the edges.

There are two drives, both approaching the house from the main road (A498). The longer comes in from the south-west and has a lodge; the shorter south-east drive does not. In the lodge garden is a fine, mature magnolia tree. The long drive divides south-west of the house, one branch going north to the stables and the other north-east into the garden, and thence to the house. All the drives have roughly gravelled or stony surfaces. The south-east drive divides the parkland into two areas, and these are rather different in character. The triangular area to the south and west is a low-lying, level meadow, with a row of trees along the road boundary, but otherwise uninterrupted. The larger area to the north and east of the house reflects to some extent the rugged hillside above, being uneven, with rocky hillocks, and sloping from north to south. Groups of oaks, with underplantings of rhododendron and other shrubs, have been planted on the hillocks, and there are single large trees dotted about, including a monkey puzzle in the middle of the main view from the house. The grazing is of inferior quality to that in the western enclosure. A stream in a natural rocky channel runs down the eastern boundary.

The drives are both now lined with trees, the south-west one with pine and sycamore,

the south-east with mixed deciduous and coniferous trees, with an underplanting of rhododendron and holly. There are delicate iron gates at the entrances. There seem to be two styles of gates and fencing, perhaps of different dates; the more delicate ironwork is painted white, and the rather more elaborate, but sturdier, examples are painted yellow.

Between the farm and the stable block, to the north, is a large rock outcrop planted with trees, round the base of which the drive skirts. This is in direct contrast to the lush meadow opposite, and after passing it is quite a surprise to see the white, colonial-style house - an effect which was probably deliberately planned.

A ha-ha forms the south- and north-eastern boundary of the garden surrounding the house. It crosses the south-east drive, and on the west of this probably continues round till it meets the south-west drive. On the east it carries on, through a right-angle, round to meet the edge of the track to the kitchen garden, just where it leaves the stable-yard. The main view of the park from the house was across the ha-ha in this direction, eastwards.

The particulars of sale of 1889 describe the grounds as '...prettily disposed lawns, hilly park-like pastures, plantation clumps. Pleasure grounds, pastures, rocks interspersed with grassy verdure, shrubs and trees.' This gives a good idea of the appearance of the grounds today, allowing for the increase in *Rhododendron ponticum*.

The garden was laid out in the late 1870s, contemporary with the house and park. The emphasis is on well grown trees and shrubs in a well-chosen site, but the ponds were obviously important, and the lower one may have been the focus of a Japanese garden, said to have been laid out by Capt. Higson. There may have been some formal bedding in the level areas near the house.

The setting is dramatic, on a steep, craggy hillside, and in the shadow of the hillfort of Dinas Emrys, and seems an unlikely place for a garden to flourish. However, due to a fold in the hillside, there is a very sheltered and relatively level area to the west of the house, where the garden has been made.

The focal point is a large pond with an artificial island, which is encircled by a walk and from which the best view of the plantings can be enjoyed. This was described as a 'reservoir' in the particulars of sale of 1886, when there were no paths and the lower pond had not been made, but by 1889 the two had become 'two beautiful clear water ponds or lakelets with islet', suggesting that despite attempts to sell the property, which was let to a long-term tenant, garden improvements were proceeding. The lower pond is now more overgrown.

The area in which most of the best trees and shrubs are planted is to the west of the upper pond and north of the lower; protected by crags behind and a large rocky outcrop to the south, some of the trees here have reached a great size. There are many species of rhododendrons and conifers, together with flowering trees and other broadleaf varieties. Some of the rhododendrons are extremely large, and there are some unusual varieties, including Chinese species, which may have been planted

in the early years of this century when they first became available. Capt. Higson was a plant collector, importing plants himself from his travels, but it is clear that the foundations of the collection were laid before his time as the 1889 sale catalogue mentions a 'fine collection of rhododendrons', as well as 'forest and other trees'.

In complete contrast, the area around the house is perfectly level, and has few surviving plants. The wild undergrowth which has spread over it makes it difficult to see what may have been here, but in the 1950s there were lawns (mown by goats) and some flowers, visible in photographs; the 1886 description merely says 'neatly laid out lower grounds'. The area immediately to the west of the house may have been formal, perhaps a rose garden, as there are the remains of some rose bushes and outgrown box hedges.

The garden wall was moved between 1900 and 1915, probably by Higson, who was in possession from 1903, to take in a triangle on the steep slope to the north of the upper pond. Whether this was meant to be a serious extension of the garden or not is now hard to say; until recent clearance, the whole area was densely overgrown with *Rhododendron ponticum*, and when this was cleared no interesting plants were found. As the area has attractive rock formations it is possible that it was intended for a rockery, and the rhododendron had spread over it since the garden became neglected, but it may have been planted as a wilderness at some time after 1915.

The kitchen garden is a rectangular plot surrounded by stone walls, about 100 m away to the north of the house. It is probably contemporary with the present house, and is now totally neglected. The site of the garden seems rather unpromising, but was probably chosen because it is one of the few reasonably level areas available without encroaching on garden or park. It nevertheless has a slight two-way slope, the south-east corner being the lowest, and the plantations to north and west now overshadow it on these sides. At the time it was in use these trees must have been a good deal smaller.

The wall is partly dry-stone, partly mortared, up to 3 m high, with the top course set on edge; on the north side the garden is levelled slightly into the hill and the wall has a retaining function. Despite the addition of massive buttresses either side of the doorway (in the south wall), there is a good deal of collapse, especially in the south and east walls.

The entrance in the south wall is the only one; it retains its door frame but the door has gone. The doorway is flat-topped with a stone lintel.

There is a small shed in the north-west corner; a building in this position is shown on the 1901 map but not on the 1915 edition, but both show a larger building just east of it, now gone. There is no map evidence for the greenhouse mentioned in 1889, although in 1915 (but not 1900) there was a tiny one shown just south of the garden, the foundations of which can be seen.

The layout of paths can just be made out due to parching and the presence of a few edging tiles. The paths were gravelled, and laid in the common pattern of perimeter and cross paths, dividing the garden into quadrants. The path along the north side ran south of the buildings, and thus was further away from the wall than the others.

The edging tiles are the glazed yellowish-brown type which when pushed into the ground give a continuous smooth, round edge (not the twisted-rope design).

The garden is lightly grazed at present, which controls the vegetation. There are several self-sown trees of a good size, including one willow right in the middle of the path along the east wall. Surviving from when the garden was in use are several fruit trees, including some which were clearly trained as espaliers.

The particulars of sale of 1886 describe the garden as 'small but productive', but by 1889 it was worthy of more detailed description, as follows: '...fruit and vegetable garden enclosed by a high stone wall and well stocked with wall fruit and bush fruit. In it is a greenhouse, potting and tool house and forcing frames.' This, and the description at the same time of the orchard as 'young', suggest that the garden and orchard had been laid out with the rest of the grounds in the late 1870s.

In the 1940s Mrs Hinxman, Capt. Higson's niece, was not yet living in the house, although Higson had died in 1921, and the tenant (a Mr Roberts, who had had to 'tackle the jungle' on his arrival) ran the kitchen garden as a market garden, growing potatoes, carrots and strawberries, the latter being transported to Manchester to be sold. There was apparently no orchard at this time, all recorded fruit coming from the espaliers in the kitchen garden, and it is likely that this tenant was responsible for removing the orchard trees, to increase the vegetable-growing area. Later Mrs Hinxman grew loganberries and apples.

The orchard is very similar to the kitchen garden, which it adjoins, but slightly smaller, and seems to have been built on to the outside of the garden after it was completed. It must be, however, contemporary or nearly so. It lies just to the east of the garden, and they have a wall in common. The orchard wall is similar to that of the garden, but on average slightly lower. The plot is again rectangular, oriented with the long axis east-west instead of north-south as the garden is, and sloping from north to south.

Originally an entrance was left at the west end of the south wall, this wall stopping short of the east wall of the garden by about a metre, but this has now been blocked up. The main entrance is through the south wall further on and is vehicle width, without gates, having been enlarged to permit the entry of caravans. There is also a small metal gate leading through the east wall near the south-east corner.

A building in the north-west corner (shown on old maps) consists of two rooms each opening on to a tiny yard in front, but not communicating with each other. The yard is surrounded by a wall as high as the eaves of the building, with a doorway through it, but the yard is not divided as one would expect for pigsties and the doors to the rooms are (almost) full height; the rooms are plastered and the eastern one has a slate slab floor. A recent building added to the east end of this is fitted out as a kitchen, and is presumably connected with the most recent use of the park as a camp-site. A further building outside the orchard wall on the east, also shown on old maps and perhaps originally a garden building, has been converted to a lavatory block.

Within the orchard no fruit trees remain, and the vegetation is mostly grass. There

is a rectangular feature in the middle defined by stones which does not appear to be the footings of a building; one can only guess at water tank, bed for flowers or soft fruit, or even an ornamental pond. If it held water it must have been fairly shallow. There is a little rough terracing to the north of it, where the slope is steepest.

In 1889 the 'young' orchard contained standard fruit trees, and the presence of fruit trees is indicated on maps up to 1915. It is likely that it was during the war, when a tenant was using the vegetable garden as a market garden, that the trees were removed.

Sources

Primary

Information from R Neale, Esq. (National Trust)

Information from Ms M Griffith, including sight of photocopies made from the sale catalogues of 1886, 1889 and 1895

Secondary

Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales, *Inventory*, Caernarvonshire Vol. II (1960)

Pierce, A, *Beddgelert* (pub. Gwynedd Council and Beddgelert History Society, 1996)