

**PLAS NEWYDD, LLANGOLLEN**

**Ref No** PGW (C) 48  
**OS Map** 117  
**Grid Ref** SJ 218 417  
**Former County** Clwyd  
**Unitary Authority** Denbighshire  
**Community Council** Llangollen  
**Designations** Listed building: Plas Newydd Grade II\*  
**Site Evaluation** Grade II\*

**Primary reasons for grading**

Survival of most of the structure of the late eighteenth- to early nineteenth-century gardens of Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, the 'ladies of Llangollen'. In their time the gardens were thought a fine example of romantic gardening and were much visited.

**Type of Site**

Informal romantic garden; formal garden

**Main Phases of Construction**

1780-1831; 1890-1910

**SITE DESCRIPTION**

Plas Newydd is essentially a simple two-storey stone cottage, originally of three bays. It is situated on high ground on the south side of Llangollen, above the narrow valley of the river Cufflymen to the east. The main front is on the south-west. In 1780 Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, subsequently known as the ladies of Llangollen, rented the cottage and renamed it Plas Newydd. Over the next fifty years (Sarah was the last to die, in 1831) they gradually transformed it, turning the extension on the east end, built in 1778, into a library, adding gothic windows, and window canopies and an elaborate porch of elaborately carved oak. (Towards the end of the eighteenth century the ladies began collecting carved oak, and the whole house, inside and out, became encrusted with it.) Stained glass, also collected, was added to the windows.

In 1876 General John Yorke (of the Erddig family) bought Plas Newydd, and greatly enlarged it. He was responsible for the pseudo timber-framing on the front. His extensions were demolished in 1963. The house was owned and meticulously maintained by Mr G.H. Robertson from Liverpool between 1890 and 1910. In 1932 Plas Newydd passed to the Llangollen Town Council, and in 1974 to Glyndwr District Council.

The stables stand to the south-west of the house, on the south side of the drive. They consist of a small black-and-white single-storey gabled building with gothic arched doors, circular windows, and a small court to the south reached through an arched gateway in a stone wall on its east side. This is lined with brick, flanked by two carved stone faces, and has a stone plaque over it with the inscription 'E/E E/1778'. The stables are therefore contemporary with the east extension of the house, and pre-date the ladies by two years.

The gardens of Plas Newydd lie to the south, east and north-east of the house. They fall into two distinct parts: the upper garden to the north-east and on the plateau to the south of the house, and the lower garden in the valley of the river Cufflymen to the east. The first is now for the most part formal, although this was not always so, while the second is an area of wild woodland garden.

Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby made the gardens between 1780 and 1831. When they arrived the house was surrounded by fields, and throughout their time at Plas Newydd the ground in front of the house (south-west side) remained a field, separated from the house by simple low wooden railings. Their idea in settling here was to lead a life of rustic simplicity, which included gardening. The kind of garden they created was strongly influenced by romantic literature and by writings on the picturesque. Next to the house, to the north-east, they made a shrubbery with winding raked gravel paths. In 1785 they built a small dairy to the west of the house. Much planting took place, and wooden boards with romantic quotations gleaned from continental writings were attached to trees. A gravel walk around the upper garden, the 'Home Circuit' was established, taking in the shrubbery, dairy, fowl yard, drying green and gardens. In 1784 a new kitchen garden was made, a new rustic 'shed' built, and they began to tinker with the river in the lower garden to make it more romantic. The kitchen garden, at first hedged, was walled in 1797. The main part of the upper garden lay to the south of the house, where there were four enclosures for fruit, vegetables and flowers approached through a gothick arch. By the early 1790s the garden was already greatly admired. Rustic embellishments made the gardens, both upper and lower, more romantic. They included Lady Eleanor's bower overlooking the valley, rustic bridges, a bird-cote, fencing, and seats. The sides of the valley were cleared and planted with a long birch avenue, and a font from Valle Crucis Abbey was set in a wall in a shady place in the valley bottom, with water dripping into it and ferns and mosses around it. Further work was done in 1799 on reshaping the river into cascades and pools. By 1800 the garden was essentially complete.

During the occupancy of General Yorke it appears that many of the ladies' more flimsy structures had already fallen into decay. However, the gardens were maintained, as is shown by a letter of 1877 from Yorke to his sister Victoria at Erddig, thanking her for sending magnolia, pampas and fig plants. He notes that he had planted box 'thick near the entrance gate, which had a very neglected appearance' (Clwyd Record Office). The next main phase in the garden's development took place between 1890 and 1910, when Plas Newydd was owned by Mr G.H. Robertson. He created the formal garden in front of the house, and in 1908 a Gorsedd circle of stones was erected on the lawn next to it for use at the Llangollen National Eisteddfod. By this time most of the rustic structures erected by the ladies had perished. Lady Eleanor's bower was dismantled and its oriel window attached to one of the gable ends of the house.

Shorn of all their rustic and romantic adornments, and of the plantings of flowering shrubs and herbaceous plants, Plas Newydd gardens have changed greatly from their original appearance. However, the basic structure of the gardens remains, and they have not been encroached on.

The gardens occupy a roughly oval area, elongated north-south, with public roads bounding the west side, a field to the north, and housing to the east. The entrance is to the south-west of the house, and a winding drive leads past the stables and approaches the house from the south, flanked by large beech trees. A short, disused drive leads from a gate further north directly to the parterre in front of the house. The upper garden is mostly on level ground to the south of the house. Immediately in front of the house is a circular formal parterre of box-edged beds and

large golden yew mounds, with the base of Chester High Cross (fifteenth-century) on a stepped plinth in the centre. Flanking it are two stone fonts from Valle Crucis Abbey and Llangollen parish church. Yew topiary adorns the front of the house. The parterre is flanked by a laurel hedge and a tree and shrub border along the boundary on the west side, and by a lawn to the south in which is set a Gorsedd circle of stone boulders, with a central stone. Around the southern end of the lawn are yew topiary bushes, cut in different shapes, with evergreen shrubs and trees flanking the drive. On the east side the lawn is bounded by a laurel hedge, with steps flanked by stone lions leading to a straight path down to the top of the lower garden. Just below the north end of this side stands a tall half-timbered black and white water tower, built by General Yorke. At the south end stands a small stone pavilion, with concrete steps up to iron gates on the west side. This is the 'Bards' Memorial', built in 1958. It stands on the site of General Yorke's peacock house. To its south are some outbuildings (stores and a greenhouse).

To the south is a large level rectangular lawn with a raised walk and holly hedge on its west side, and a laurel hedge on the east. At the south end is a shrubbery of trees and laurel underplanting, with the Cufflymen falling steeply in a narrow ravine.

The dairy stands by the boundary to the west of the house. It is a small oval building of rough stones and a gently sloping conical slate roof, sunk below ground level, with a narrow walk around its east side. On the north side is an arched doorway, and around the walls are five small circular windows.

To the north-east of the house is a narrow sloping lawn on which are two golden yews and two golden Irish yews. Next to the house there are modern paths and flowerbeds. To the north-west is a laurel hedge, to the south-east evergreen shrubs and trees, and to the north-west a shrubbery of mixed deciduous and coniferous trees and shrubs. (This is the famous shrubbery of Eleanor and Sarah, in which they were wont to hide from unwelcome visitors, read poetry, wander in the moonlight.) It is a tangled area of mainly deciduous shrubs, interspersed with some large trees, including two evergreen oaks, horse chestnuts and hollies. It is bounded on the north-east side by a high revetment wall below which is a sloping meadow down to the river.

The lower garden lies in the valley of the river Cufflymen which runs south-north to the east of the upper garden. This is a wilder, more 'romantic' woodland part of the garden, laid out informally. Of its original layout only the paths, the font and some trees remain. Earthen paths lead from the upper garden down into the valley. At the top of the northernmost one is a small circular belvedere, recently constructed on the site of Lady Eleanor's bower (a more rustic creation). From its balcony there are views out over the valley. Near the foot of this path are the stone footings of a ruined circular building. In the valley bottom the paths wind along both sides of the river, crossing it over three small single-arched stone bridges. At the eastern end of the southernmost bridge is a stone wall in the middle of which there is an octagonal font (from Valle Crucis Abbey) set in a tufa alcove bounded by a gothic stone arch with a worn stone head at the top. Above the font is an iron pipe, now dry, which originally led water from the spring behind into it. On either side of the alcove are two inscribed poems initialled 'E B S P / 1782' (Eleanor Butler, Sarah Ponsonby). Flanking the wall are angled stone benches, and in front is a narrow stone-flagged terrace. The valley is largely deciduous woodland, including some large beeches, with much laurel underplanting. There is no trace of the birch avenue planted by Eleanor and Sarah.

## Sources

### Primary

1859-60 anon pencil sketch of the approach to the house: National Library of Wales, drawings vol 45, no. 11.

Letter referring to gift of plants from Erddig (1877): Clwyd Record Office (Hawarden) ref. D/E/993.

1879 'F.C.H.C.' wash drawing of the house and garden: National Library of Wales, drawings vol 380, f. 29.

### Secondary

Picturesque Views in Wales (c. 1850).

Kenyon, K.M.R., 'Garden of the Ladies of Llangollen', Country Life 135 (18 June 1964), pp. 1588-89.

Mavor, E., The Ladies of Llangollen (1971)

Pratt, D., and A.G. Veysey, A Handlist of the Topographical Prints of Clwyd (1977), nos 338-54.

Mavor, E., A Year with the Ladies of Llangollen (1984).

Fawcett, H.G., Guide leaflet to Plas Newydd (1988).

## **NERQUIS HALL**

**Ref No** PGW (C) 50  
**OS Map** 117  
**Grid Ref** SJ 241 600  
**County** Clwyd  
**District** Delyn BC  
**Community Council** Nercwys  
**Designations** Listed building: Nerquis Hall Grade I  
**Site Evaluation** Grade II

### **Primary reasons for grading**

Partial survival of early eighteenth-century formal layout, including canal; c. 1790 to early nineteenth-century unusual garden and park buildings

### **Type of Site**

Small landscape park; multi-period garden, with formal and informal elements

### **Main Phases of Construction**

c. 1700-1734; c. 1790 - early nineteenth century

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

Nerquis Hall is a substantial three-storey stone house in Elizabethan style, situated on the west flank of the valley of the river Terrig, to the south of Mold. An older house of the Wynn family stood just to the east of the present house until about 1797, when it was demolished to make way for gothic wings, added to the present house. This was built in 1638-40 for John Wynn (a building contract dated 1637 states that Raffe Booth, a freemason of Chester, agrees to work to a design of Evan Edwards, carpenter, using the house at Rhual as a model). The house is built on a traditional E-plan (without the central projection), with the main entrance on the north. It has mullioned and transomed windows, with stepped windows in the gable ends. At the end of the seventeenth century Nerquis was owned by Paul Pindar, and after his death in 1700 by his godson Paul Williams.

In 1790 Nerquis passed from Elizabeth Hyde (née Williams) to John Gifford, who probably made the park, and enlarged the gardens. On his death in 1797 Nerquis passed to Elizabeth Gifford (died 1844), his elder daughter, who instigated further changes to the house, buildings, and gardens. Soon after 1797 large gothic wings were added to the east and west, with battlemented screen walls and a gatehouse in similar style to the north-east. The wings were removed, along with a gothic porch of 1825, probably by Benjamin Gummow (re-erected at Portmeirion), in about 1966.

To the east of the house is a fine group of stone outbuildings arranged around a largely cobbled courtyard. The yard is entered under a battlemented gothic arch, flanked by false bastions and a screen to the north-east corner of the house in the same style, built in about 1797. The screen is decorated with blank gothic arches with false, painted

windows, with quatrefoil panels above. The bastions have similar quatrefoils and blank arrowslits. The outbuildings on the south side of the yard have been converted into dwellings. Most of the east side is taken up by a large barn. An arch below the east side leads through to an outer yard, also accessible through field gates to the north. There is a range of pigsties along the north side. To the east is a walled enclosure, formerly for horses, surrounded by high stone walls. To its south-west is a roughly triangular former stack yard bounded on the east by a curving revetment wall.

Nerquis has a small park of about 27 acres, on rolling ground to the north and south of the house. This was probably made in about 1790 by John Gifford, at the same time as he was enlarging the garden. It was called a deer park, and is extremely simple, with little ornament and planting. However, a long ha-ha was made on the south boundary of the garden to give views out across the southern part. The northern part is ornamented with a gothic eyecatcher known as 'Ty Castell', built in the same style as the gothic wings of the house by Elizabeth Gifford in about 1825.

The southern part of the park consists of a large squarish pasture field in the angle between the walled garden and the southern end of the canal. It is bounded on the south side by a substantial stone wall, an ancient boundary wall, with large mature beech trees in the south-east corner, against the wall. On rising ground to the south of the walled garden is a clump of trees, mainly oak and horse chestnut, with some recent planting. To its south-east is an isolated cedar.

The northern part of the park consists of a roughly rectangular pasture field to the north of the drives and outbuildings, bounded on the north side by a former colliery tramway. Against the north boundary, on the highest part of the park, is a small stone sham building, 'Ty Castell'. This is an L-shaped two-dimensional gothic eyecatcher, facing south towards the house. It was restored in 1970. It consists of a two-storey central semi-circular battlemented tower with a blocked central door, quatrefoil opening, and blank arrowslits. This is flanked by side walls in which there are two open doorways. The walls are terminated by two small circular turrets, similarly decorated, the east one incomplete. On the west side, facing the road, there is a cross wall terminated by a similar turret. The north and east sides stand only up to a metre high. The building originally had a lean-to roof, and was possibly partly used as a shelter for deer. To the west is a group of beeches. Near the east end of the field is an informal pond with trees, including limes, around it. Although the pond is probably utilitarian in origin, the tree planting may have been for ornamental purposes.

Opposite the entrance to Nerquis a short track bisects a former field to the Nerquis village road. This is flanked by stone walls similar to those on either side of the entrance, and by rows of mature trees - beeches to the south and horse chestnuts to the north. The track and walling probably date to the early nineteenth-century phase of landscaping.

The garden is situated mainly to the south and west of the house, on ground sloping gently from west to east. It can be divided into four main sections: the entrance drives and forecourt; the former canal and terraces; the informal area; and the walled garden. It was made in two main phases, in the early eighteenth century and the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century. The earliest part was planned by Paul Pindar and executed after his death in 1700 by his godson Paul Williams. In his will Pindar states: 'when my debts and my mother's debts are paid that the Gardens and Canall at Nerquis may be made according to the draught or plat-form Robert Lawton has drawn and with my agent has to produce ...'. An estate plan, made for Edward Williams, of 1734 shows the canal in

place to the south of the house, and a small wooded area to the east of its north end. Apart from this the gardens to the east and west were not yet in existence. These, including the pond and the fine ha-ha that bounds the west part of the garden, were probably added by John Gifford in about 1791. Miss Elizabeth Gifford added a 'stove-house' against the north wall of the walled garden, and the gothic orangery at its west end, built in 1825 by Benjamin Gummow. The only major changes since that date have been the draining of the canal, probably in the mid nineteenth century, and the making of the paved garden to the west of the house, which replaced a demolished wing, and the paved terrace to the south, by the present owners.

The entrance is off a minor road to the west of the house, and consists of twin wrought iron gates flanked by paired openwork cast iron piers, dating to the late eighteenth century. To the north of the entrance is a low stone wall, and to the south a higher curving brick wall for a short distance, then a stone wall. The gates lead to two parallel drives, the northern of which is now in use as the main drive. This was straightened in the late eighteenth century as the service drive, leading to the stable yard to the east of the house. It is flanked by low walls of uncoursed stone, that to the south screening it from the Victorian carriage drive. This is the original drive, shown on the 1734 estate map. It is now disused, grassed over, flanked by rows of horse chestnuts, and ends in a sloping lawn running down to the forecourt. The present drive leads to the entrance to the forecourt, to the north-west of the house. The forecourt entrance has similar gates to those at the main entrance, flanked by side gates and walls of large blocks of dressed stone. The forecourt is of gravel next to the house, with a level lawn to the north, and a row of yew trees along the curving north boundary wall. There is pictorial evidence that there was originally a pond in front of the house, but this is long since filled in and grassed over.

The service drive continues around the north side of the forecourt to the stable yard. Next to it, to the north of the stable yard, is a small former water garden, with a rectangular, sunken former pond, now dry, in the middle. There are ruined remains of a recess or steps in the north side, and possible footings of a building to the east. At the east end of the pond is row of three large limes.

To the south of the house is a long wide grass terrace, cut into the slope at its north end, flanked by yew hedges (modern), with gates leading to the former park at the end. The former canal, now dry, partly filled in, and overgrown, is about twice the length of the walk, and runs north-south parallel to it, on slightly lower ground to the east of the house. A grass scarp separates the terraces, with modern stone steps down in the middle. Grass walks flank the canal, with a higher, disused path above it on the west side. The position of the canal may relate to existing field boundaries, the earlier house, to practical considerations of water supply and drainage, or to a combination of these factors. A plan of 1937 shows a central path, probably of gravel, running the length of the main terrace, with two side paths at the north end. These have now gone.

Immediately in front of the house is a paved terrace bounded by a low stone wall, with a cobbled and paved garden to the west of the house, bounded by yew hedging on the north and west, in the middle of which is a baluster sundial. This part of the garden was made by the present owners. Late eighteenth-century splayed stone steps flanked by curving wrought iron balustrading lead from an eighteenth-century garden door in the house to the paved area.

To the east of the canal is a sloping area of informal garden, made in the last decade of the eighteenth century. It is bounded by a stone wall,

and is built up above the slope on the east side. A grass walk runs from the south end of the canal through informally planted trees and shrubs to another irregular sloping lawn, with levelled former tennis courts. A grass path leads northwards from here back up to the canal level. Near the north-east corner of this area is a roughly circular pond with a grass walk around its west side. A sloping lawn to its north-west is bounded by a stone revetment wall on the west, by a grass scarp on the north, and by trees and shrubs to the east. In its north-west corner is a small rendered two-storey brick pavilion, originally a dovecote on the first floor and privies below, with a modern outside staircase. At the north end of the lawn footings of a former glasshouse are visible in the grass. To its north is a cobbled and tiled path, the 'dung walk [or passage]', bounded by high brick walls except in the middle of the south side, which was lowered by the present owners. An opening in the centre of the north wall leads to the 'poultry court', the former poultry yard. This is a small enclosed garden with a sunken circular brick-lined pool, or duck pond, in the centre.

There is evidence from the 1937 plan that this informal part of the garden was laid out with paths, probably of gravel, leading to the lawns, pond, and to two summerhouses, at the north and south ends of the garden. These have now gone, as have the paths. The glasshouse was in existence at that date, and a straight path next to it ran westwards all the way to the orangery. A long straight path also ran along the east side of the canal.

The walled garden, also made in the last decade of the eighteenth century, lies to the west of the house and grass walk. It is bounded on the south side by a curving ha-ha, on the east by modern hedging, and on the west and north by a high brick wall topped with stone coping. Flues within the wall indicate that it was at least in part heated. The walled area was formerly a kitchen garden and orchard, but was always integrated into the main garden, originally with a central east-west path. This now only runs from the east end of the walled garden as far as the orchard area. The 1937 plan shows two cross paths and a perimeter path along the ha-ha, now gone.

At the east end of the wall steps lead up to a raised walk or terraced garden built against the wall. In the middle of the wall is an old wooden door, with an elaborate carved and moulded surround, which appears to have been brought from elsewhere. Below the raised walk are a smaller 1930s glasshouse, a free-standing glasshouse, and cold frames. To the west, at a slightly higher level, are the back wall and sloping side walls, with dressed stone ends, of a large lean-to building. This is probably Miss Gifford's 'stove house', made in the early nineteenth century, the contents of which were sold after her death.

At the east end of the north wall is a long lean-to glasshouse backed by a brick wall, with an area of demolished glass house at the west end. This dates to about 1938. A new potting shed has been built against the north side of the wall. To its west a path on the outside of the wall denotes the position of the boiler rooms and coal storage. A doorway at the west end leads into the garden. At the west end of the garden is the semi-octagonal gothic orangery by Benjamin Gummow, set at an angle against the middle of the west wall. It has a crenellated top, brick sides, partly rendered, and five tall gothic windows, the front three with cast iron tracery, with dressed stone surrounds. The orangery formerly had underfloor hypocaust heating, with a furnace behind, but the floor is now concreted over. To the south is a small single-storey stone cottage with a gothic window in its gable end.



The walled garden is now largely utilitarian, with a small orchard area at the west end, and an area of grass and ornamental trees along the south side.

## **Sources**

### **Primary**

Clwyd Record Office, Hawarden:  
1637 building contract: D/NH 1007A.  
Sir Paul Pindar's will (1705): D/NH 1056.  
Survey of Nerquis demesne (1734): D/NH 958.  
John Gifford's diaries 1789-91: D/NH 1078.  
Gothic extensions c. 1796: D/NH 1274.  
Gummow design drawings 1804-13: D/NH 938.  
1937 plan of Nerquis Hall and gardens: private collection.

### **Secondary**

Hubbard, E., Clwyd (1986), pp. 407-08.  
Pennant, T., A Tour in Wales, vol 1 (1778), p. 419, and drawing by Moses Griffith in extra illustrated edition.