

CEFN BRYNTALCH

Ref No	PGW (Po) 29 (POW)
OS Map	136
Grid Ref	SO 177964
Former County	Powys
Unitary Authority	Powys
District	Montgomeryshire
Community Council	Llandyssil
Designations	Listed Building: House Grade II. Tree Preservation Order: blanket order, east field.
Site Evaluation	Grade II*
Primary reasons for grading	Exceptionally important Queen Anne revival house c. 1870 by G. F. Bodley and Philip Webb with largely intact contemporary formal garden, the only recorded Welsh garden by either Bodley or Webb. 1896 - c.1945 home of composer Peter Warlock.
Type of Site	House and formal garden in rural setting.
Main Phases of Construction	c. 1870

SITE DESCRIPTION

Cefn Bryntalch is sited to the north of a small road which links the village of Green Lane with the B 4385, on the northern edge of a steep slope which overlooks the Severn valley to the north and west. The garden lies to the south-east and west of the house. Cefn Bryntalch is regarded as one of the seminal smaller houses of the late nineteenth century, contributing to the Queen Anne revival of the 1870s and 1880s. The three-storey house is austere, standing tall in detailed red brick with a steeply pitched, hipped, slate roof. On the south front there are three gables, with timber detail, and sash windows. A central ground floor French widow is narrow and elongated. Above, on the second storey there is a tall Venetian window which is repeated on the north face. On the north-east entrance front there is a full height brick and stone Jacobean porch with a timber upper storey containing leaded lights. A set of five semi-circular dressed stone steps connect the porch with the sunk forecourt below. On either side of the steps a steep grass bank, with circular projections at either end, separates the house from the forecourt. On the south of the forecourt a set of wide brick steps connects the south

garden above.

It appears that Cefn Bryntalch was built on a green-field site in about 1870. It is unclear who commissioned the house but the land was in the ownership of Upper Bryntalch Farm, opposite, whose local landholding extended to about 600 acres. The earliest recorded owners of this land were the Buckley-Jones family in the eighteenth century and a Robert Griffith Temple in 1846. The building of the house is believed to have necessitated the re-routing of the road to the east, the line of the old road being retained within the property boundary as the new formal drive. It is believed that the house, outbuildings and lodge were all originally designed by C. F. Bodley (1827-1907) but that the work was passed on to Philip Webb (1831-1915) in the early 1870s on the event of Bodley becoming ill. How attentive to the original plans Webb was is unclear. None of the drawings or plans survive apart from a list of building specifications which are concerned with brick size and door and window detail. By 1896 the small estate, of about 60 acres, had been bought by the composer Peter Warlock whose friend Frederick Delius visited, and is believed to have composed at, Cefn Bryntalch. The Warlock family owned the site until after 1945 when it was bought by a local farming family, the Wigleys, who later sold on the house and garden to the Jenkins family from whom the present owners bought the house about ten years ago. The lodge was sold off by the Wigleys as a separate lot at the same time as the house sale.

A cobbled service court, contemporary with the house, containing stables, carriage houses and auxiliary buildings, lies to the north of the house and is connected to it by a two-storey service wing on the west and a high screen wall on the east. A stone Jacobean-style doorway is located in the centre of the east wall. All of the service buildings are in a similar style to the house and are made of brick, stone and timber. A carriage entrance is located on the north-east side of the yard. Some of the stonework appears to have been limed. The service wing is currently being restored and converted into accommodation. A raised stone terrace/patio has been constructed along its east side. The other buildings, including four carriage houses/cart sheds on the east, are in use as garages, a workshop, an office and for storage. A stone wall that separated a small court to the rear of the house and the yard has been demolished. Apparently it was in a state of collapse when the present owners bought the property.

The gardens at Cefn Bryntalch lie to the south, south-west and west of the house on terraced ground which slopes to the south-west. They are separated from the road to the south-east by one field which lies outside of the registered area. The formal drive ran along the northern boundary of this field, connecting to the forecourt on the north-east of the house and a lodge on the north side of the farm road to the south. The field contains various specimen trees planted on, or around, two earth mounds. The lodge is now in a separate ownership to the house and the formal drive has been abandoned. The present drive, which enters the site on the northern end of the field, is believed to have been the service drive.

The garden is laid out in a series of formal enclosures connected by paths and steps. The south front of the house opens on to a small, sunken rectangular lawn which is surrounded by raised straight paths. The house is separated from the lawn by a narrow strip containing two oval overgrown flower beds. The north-east path connects to the forecourt by a set of wide brick steps. On the south-west and south-east corners of the lawn the paths intersect

rectangular raised platforms. In the south-west the platform is paved, laid out as a seating area, which is enclosed on the west and south by the remains of a stone balustrade. On the south-east the platform is grassed. The ground to the south of the lawn slopes away down hill to the field and, to the west, towards the kitchen garden. Nineteenth-century wooden palings and iron park fence separate the garden from the field to the south and east. Mid-way along this boundary a shallow semi-circular projection juts out into the field. Two paths, starting from each of the platforms, run through this sloping area to the west. On the west of the lawn a set of brick steps and a path connect to the north to a large split-level rectangular lawn on the west of the house. This lawn is enclosed by a naturally wooded bank on the north which continues out into the farmland. On the western end of this bank, within the farmland, there is a medieval motte. The east end of the lawn is on a level with the house but after about 30m the lawn drops steeply, by about 3m, to a second level below. This lower level was the site of a tennis court and has been planted up with Austrian pine to act as a wind barrier for the house. A simple nineteenth-century park fence along its western edge separates this from the farmland beyond. The two lawns are connected in the south-east corner by the remains of a set of curving stone steps. Two further winding paths lead off from these steps connecting to a parallel formal west walk which lies about 2m below the level of the upper lawn. The connecting slope is planted up with yew, laurel and other shrubs. The formal west walk, set between a pair of wide herbaceous borders backed by yew hedges, starts in the south-west of the south lawn, to the north of the paved platform. This walk continues for about 30m, dropping to two further lower levels by sets of formal brick steps. An iron rose arch is set above the second set of steps and a small circular bird bath lies to the south of the walk, mid-way along the eastern section. To the west of the walk the ground drops again into a small amphitheatre which has a steep bank of rough grass and stone and its eastern side and a line of Lawson cypress on its west, which encloses a central circular terrace. A steep path runs from the end of the walk down around the eastern side of the feature to enter a level circular area. A further path branches off from the end of the walk to zig-zag down the hillside, to the south of the amphitheatre, to reach the kitchen garden. On the north of the house, separating it from the service yard, there is a small, enclosed area of sunk lawn, crossed by old brick paths, which connect with the formal doorway in the east wall.

The garden of Cefn Bryntalch is believed to be contemporary with the house. It was certainly in place by 1888 when it was recorded on the first Ordnance Survey map. No actual plans of the garden are known to have survived but some information about the garden area occurs in Bodley's building specifications for the house, dated 1868, which note the proposed creation of different ground levels around the site of the house and the use of bricks 2 7/8 in. x 2 in. thick in the house; similar in size to the bricks which were used in the garden features. Either Bodley, Webb or both could have been involved in the design of the garden. However, it is most likely, given that Webb took over from Bodley, that the garden was laid out by Webb on, or shortly before, the completion of the house, possibly working from initial ideas drawn up by Bodley. In design and material the garden is an example of the early Arts and Crafts style associated with William Morris and John Dando Sedding, both of whom Bodley and Webb knew and admired. Sadly there are no known photographs or illustrations recording the appearance of the gardens, but it is understood that the house employed three gardeners. Peter Warlock apparently used to withdraw into the garden to work in the amphitheatre. After the departure of the Warlocks the gardens remained structurally intact but gradually declined. The small court to the north of the house is believed to have been a

service garden, perhaps being used as a drying ground.

The kitchen garden at Cefn Bryntalch lies to the south-west of the house on a sunken level terrace overlooking farmland to the west. The garden covers about 1 acre and is laid out on two separate levels, surrounded by overgrown laurel hedging and a mixed shelter belt. The upper level appears to have been a fruit garden and orchard. A line of mature standard fruit trees survives along its western side. Both of the garden areas were marked out with clipped box hedges, few of which survive in the upper eastern portion. Rotting wooden stakes, which may have marked out borders, do partly survive. The area of the fruit garden is overgrown and contains the stumps of Christmas trees which were grown here for sale until recently.

The western section of the garden lies about 2m below the level of the fruit garden and is surrounded by raised earth banks on which overgrown mixed hedge and laurel grows. Some mature beech trees grow in the south boundary hedge, marking the line of an old road, later the formal drive. The garden is laid out in a cruciform design by overgrown box hedges which stand to about 0.7m high. The hedging surrounded four quarters of vegetable garden which is now lost beneath a rough grass cover apart from a small area on the north-west which is still used as a vegetable garden. On the north side of the garden a modern, aluminium lean-to greenhouse has been attached to older brick footings and a 4m high rear brick wall. The greenhouse has a central aisle and an abandoned boiler, in a brick lean-to at the rear, shows that the wall was once heated. A narrow unplanted brick edged border runs along the south front of the greenhouse. On both the west and the east sides of the greenhouse, partly lost beneath undergrowth, there are the remains of at least three long brick frames. On the west the wooden lights partly remain in place but they no longer contain any glass. To the rear of the west frame there is a small concrete block work shed. To the west of this, near the garden boundary, there is a disused static caravan. A nineteenth-century iron field gate separates the garden from the field beyond.

The kitchen garden is believed to be contemporary with the house. It is known that there was little top soil on site and as such all of the soil in this area was bought in. It is unclear why the garden was laid out on two separate levels, or why there was such a difference in height between them. The vegetable garden may have been 'sunk' in an effort to protect it from prevailing winds. The present owners still maintain a small area of vegetable garden and restored the lean-to greenhouse about ten years ago.

Sources

- Primary** The Buckley-Jones collection. National Library of Wales.
Bodley, G. F., *Building Specifications* (1868), Cefnbryntalch 369. National Library of Wales
1846 tithe map. National Library of Wales
- Secondary** Hall, M., 'Cefn Bryntalch', *Country Life* Sept 7, 1994, pp. 58-61
Haslam, R., *The Buildings of Powys* (1979) p. 75