

**CADW/ICOMOS REGISTER OF PARKS AND GARDENS
OF SPECIAL HISTORIC INTEREST IN WALES**

SITE DOSSIER

SITE NAME Maes Manor Hotel

REF. NO. PGW (Gt) 54

OS MAP 171 GRID REF. ST 173988

FORMER COUNTY Gwent UNITARY AUTHORITY Islwyn
COMMUNITY COUNCIL Blackwood

DESIGNATIONS Listed building: Grade
National Park AONB SSSI NNR ESA GAM SAM CA

SITE EVALUATION Grade II

Primary reasons for grading
Well preserved garden designed by T.H. Mawson

TYPE OF SITE
Terraced Edwardian formal garden; walled garden

MAIN PHASES OF CONSTRUCTION
c. 1907

VISITED BY/DATE Elisabeth Whittle/March 1992

HOUSE

Name Maes Manor Hotel

Grid ref ST 173988

Date/style c. 1890/Edwardian vernacular

Brief description

Maes Manor Hotel is set on a south-facing slope above the Sirhowy Valley, on the west side of the river, to the north of Blackwood. Although set in a highly industrialized and built-up area its immediate surroundings are rural, and it is reached up a narrow lane from the main road in the valley bottom.

The site, originally known as Maesruddud, is first mentioned in 1434. A stone barn to the west of the house appears to be the earliest building on the site; the house and other ancillary buildings date to about 1890, and were built by Captain Edmund Williams, a local mine owner and Sheriff of Monmouthshire. The architect was E.P. Warren. The house is a two-storey mansion of grey stone with a pitched slate roof and mullioned and transomed windows. It is L-shaped, with a projection on the east side, at the end of which is the main entrance.

OUTBUILDINGS

Name Coach House; outbuildings

Grid ref ST 173988

Date/style, and brief description

Various outbuildings lie to the west of the house. The most prominent is the Coach House, a two-storey rendered building, with a pitched slate roof and a small clock lantern on top. This has a date of 1914 on the front. To its south is a yard surrounded by a high stone wall, in which are a number of utilitarian stone outbuildings, including a stone barn aligned east-west along the south side, which may be older than the rest of the buildings. At the entrance to the site twin lodges flank the drive (see Garden Section).

THE PLEASURE GARDEN

Central grid ref ST 173988

Date/style c. 1907/architectural

GENERAL DESCRIPTION, HISTORY AND LAYOUT

The garden of Maes Manor Hotel was designed by Thomas H. Mawson in about 1907 for L. Brewer-Williams, mine owner. At that time the house was called Maesruddud. Mawson thought that his garden was successful, but that 'having regard to its locality it was rather like a jewel stuck into a lump of lead' (Mawson, c. 1927). Its design is formal and architectural, with two main axes - one north-south down the centre of the walled garden and the semi-circular garden, and one east-west along the entrance drive.

The garden lies to the north-east, east and south-east of the house, on ground sloping gently to the south. The entrance, to the east of the house, is off a narrow lane. Stone walls, side entrances and gate piers flank the entrance, with a pair of lodges on either side of the drive just inside. These are identical, of two storeys, with pitched slate roofs, and casement windows. Each has a wooden bench under a pent roof facing the drive. The drive runs straight to the small rectangular entrance forecourt on the north side of the house, and is flanked by ornamental woodland of mixed deciduous and coniferous trees with an underplanting chiefly of rhododendrons and laurels. The entrance to the forecourt is flanked by high stone walls and gate piers.

A raised terrace with a roughly coursed and buttressed stone revetment wall runs the full length of the north side of the forecourt, with dressed stone steps up to it on the main north-south axis of the garden. At the west end of the terrace the terrace projects a little way out into the forecourt, and is topped by stone balustrading, much of which has now gone or is broken. A wide gravel path runs the length of the terrace, and leads, at the east end, to a square stone pavilion with a pyramidal roof topped by a ball finial.

Above the terrace, on its north side, is a rectangular walled garden, bounded on the north, east and west sides by high stone walls, stepped down at intervals, with ridged tops of stone tiles. The inside of the walls are lined with brick, and the two northern corners are curved. Along the south side is a roughly coursed retaining wall above the terrace, topped by a clipped yew hedge. On the central north-south axis is a flight of stone steps leading up to iron gates into the walled garden, flanked by dressed stone piers topped with ball finials. The interior layout of the garden has gone, the whole being grassed over, and two modern chalets are built in it, towards the north end. To the east of the walled garden is a belt of mixed woodland, which continues around the field to the east, along its north and east sides.

The southern part of the garden, to the south of the forecourt, consists of a series of shallow semi-circular grass terraces, leading down to the semi-circular stone revetment wall topped by a box hedge on the boundary of the garden. The ground slopes away below the garden, giving views to the south, and a few clumps of pines have been planted in the field below. In the upper, level lawn, are a number of notable trees, including two large yews and a large Monkey Puzzle. The formal garden merges into the informal woodland to the east, where there are further notable trees, including pines, and where there is also a ruinous wooden turning summerhouse. The terraces are bounded by grass scarps or drystone walling, with stone steps down the central north-south axis, at the south end of which steps lead down to a wooden gate into the field. An interesting

feature of the garden is the drainage, with small iron grilles in the lawns at the top of vertical drainage holes.

STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

The drive is tarmacked, and enters the grounds to the east of the house, off a narrow lane. It runs straight to the forecourt, which is also tarmacked, and is roughly rectangular in shape. To the west there is access to further parking in front of the Coach House.

Along the north side of the forecourt is a raised terrace, bounded on the south by a roughly coursed stone revetment wall with buttresses at intervals. The wall projects further into the forecourt at the west end. A wide gravel path runs the full length of the terrace.

The house sits on a levelled platform, which extends eastwards to include a level lawn, bounded on its south side by a straight grass scarp about 1 m. high. Below this, to the south, are a series of shallow semi-circular terraces. At each end of the upper one are short straight stretches of drystone revetment walling and steps down to a curving, gently sloping lawn, which bounds the lower semi-circular level, and lies on the southern edge of the garden. It is bounded on the south by a drystone revetment wall, below which is a sloping field. The upper semi-circular lawn is bounded by a low grass scarp, and the lower one is bounded by a low drystone revetment wall, about 0.6 m. high.

BUILT COMPONENTS

The entrance to the garden is flanked by stone walls, in which are side arched doors, and square stone gate piers topped by ball finials. Immediately inside, the drive is flanked by a pair of identical small lodges. These are two-storey, rendered, with pitched slate roofs and casement windows. Both have wooden benches under pent roofs facing the drive.

At the other end of the drive, the entrance to the forecourt is flanked by high square stone gate piers topped by ball finials and high stone walls which slope down either side of the piers to a height of c. 2 m. In the centre of the forecourt is an oval raised bed surrounded with drystone walling.

To the north of the forecourt, on the main north-south axis of the gardens, stone steps lead up to the terrace, and then up to the entrance to the walled garden. Both flights are of dressed stone, the lower flight curved at the bottom. The entrance to the walled garden is flanked by square stone gate piers topped with ball finials, between which are iron gates. At the west end of the terrace, where it is wider, the revetment wall is topped by classical stone balustrading, much of which has fallen or is missing. At the foot of the terrace is some ornamental rockwork.

At the east end of the terrace steps lead up to a small square pavilion at the south end of the east wall of the walled garden. It is built of stone, with a pyramidal stone slate roof topped with a ball finial. It has a door and window on the west side, and windows on the south and east sides. A flight of stone steps flank its east side. It is now used as a garden store.

To the north of the terrace is the walled garden. This may originally have been a kitchen garden, but as it is an integral part of the design it will be considered here. It is a rectangular area, with curved corners at the north end, and is bounded by stone walls c. 3.5 m. high, lined with brick on the inside. The walls are stepped up the slope, and have ridged stone tile tops. There are doorways in the east and west sides, the foot of that on

the east side now being considerably above ground level. There is no visible trace of the original internal layout, which was rectilinear, and two modern chalets have been built in it.

On the central north-south axis of the southern part of the garden are a series of drystone steps leading down from one terrace to the next. These are flanked by low drystone walls topped with stone flags. At the southern end of the axis stone steps lead down to a wooden gate with curving top, flanked by square stone piers topped by ball finials (? replacements), which leads into the field below.

In the wood to the east of the upper lawn is a ruinous wooden turning summerhouse. It appears to be in its original position.

ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENTS

All gate piers are topped by stone ball finials.

Iron grilles at the top of drainage holes are visible at intervals in the lawns in the south part of the garden.

PLANTED COMPONENTS

Some fine trees survive, which probably date from the making of the garden, but any shrub (except for woodland underplanting) and herbaceous planting has been lost.

The entrance drive is flanked by wide belts of mixed deciduous and coniferous woodland, including a row of firs along the south side, with an underplanting of rhododendrons and laurels.

The terrace to the north of the forecourt has a flowerbed with mixed shrub and herbaceous planting (modern) along its outer side, and both the central island bed and rockwork beds of the forecourt have modern plantings of conifers and herbaceous plants.

The walled garden is laid out to lawn.

On the lawn to the east of the house are two large yew trees and a large Monkey Puzzle tree. The lawn merges into woodland on its east edge, in which there are two large pine trees. The southern part of the garden is laid out to lawn, bounded by clipped box hedging. The upper semi-circular terrace has two square beds (hybrid tea roses) at either end, and a circular bed in the middle with yuccas (? original) in it. The lower semi-circular terrace has two curving beds. To the west is an area of mixed woodland.

In the field below the southern part of the garden are several clumps of mature pines.

The field to the east of the walled garden is bounded by belts of mixed woodland.

Reconstructions of original planted features

None

Special collections of garden plants

None

Documented living plants

None

Other (including elements of nature conservation interest)
None known

ESSENTIAL SETTING AND VIEWS BEYOND THE SITE

Essential setting: pasture fields to S, SE and W of site

Views: S and SW from house and southern part of garden

ANY SPECIAL FEATURES

None

SURVIVAL OF INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS

Structural components: all

Built components: most

Architectural ornaments: most

Planted components: some (trees)

SOURCES

Secondary

Mawson, T.H., *The Life and Work of an English Landscape Architect* (London, 1927), p. 140.

Thomas, H., and E.P. Mawson, *The Art and Craft of Garden Making* (London, 5th edition), pp. 31 (plan), 40.