

COLBY LODGE

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| Ref number | PGW (Dy) 29 (PEM) |
| OS map | 158 |
| Grid ref | SN 1573 0807 |
| Former county | Dyfed |
| Unitary authority | Pembrokeshire |
| Community council | Amroth |
| Designations | Listed Building: House Grade II; Pembrokeshire Coast National Park |
| Site evaluation | Grade II |

Primary reasons for grading This is primarily a woodland garden with exotic trees and shrubs, developed by various owners from about 1894 onwards. There is an unusual gazebo within the walled garden which was designed by Wyn Jones and completed in 1975. The collection of semi-hardy herbaceous and woody material within the walled garden is the work of Mr and Mrs Scourfield Lewis during the 1990s.

Type of site Late nineteenth-century garden of woodland walks with later additions of plant material.

Main phases of construction The drives and the ha-ha appear to be extant by 1889, the network of paths within the woodland is probably post 1918. The walled garden was developed in the mid 1970s and revived from mid 1980s.

Site description

The earliest name for the property was Rhydlangoed, which translates, intriguingly, as the ford of the village/church of the empty, vain or blind. As the house is only a short distance from the church it could mean the ford of the empty church. The name 'Rhydlancoed' is still current on present maps but it is thought that the full name was probably Rhyd Felin Coedrath (the mill ford by the wood). The name shortened with time and should probably be translated as 'the ford by the wood'. In the eighteenth century, the land belonged to the Skyrme family of Llawhaden and in the Land Tax of 1786 it is referred to as 'New House'. The following year 'Rerdlangwig' was part of a thirteen-acre holding. A short time later, in 1794, the property is called 'Rhylangwyg' in a marriage settlement. During the mid eighteenth century the Skyrme family fell into debt and in 1779 the sale of their estate was ordered. John Colby of Ffynnone (Pembrokeshire) bought 123 acres of the property in 1787. This included the land on which the house now stands and land up to Amroth Farm, where he acquired an interest in 'Redlangoige Colliery'.

With the new owner came a fine new mansion and by 1833 Lewis was able to note: 'Colby Lodge, an elegant mansion, seat of Captain Protheroe, is beautifully situated in a romantic dell opening at one extremity towards the sea, of which it commands a fine and interesting view'. According to the present owners, this is felt to be something of an exaggeration as it is unlikely that the sea was ever visible from the house. The Tithe Award Survey and Schedule of Apportionments of about 1835 shows Colby as owning the Lodge and Thomas Protheroe as the occupier, but the lands leased by Protheroe, some 77 acres, appear not to have been associated with the house. Part of the meadow, to the south of the Lodge, was rented from Colby by Stephen Hughes and the remaining part and the woodland to the west was rented by Thomas Smith; the area of the walled garden also seems to be in separate occupation. From about 1825 onwards the house had various tenants and one owner, Samuel Chamberlain, until it was bought by Samuel Kay in 1873. After the second Samuel Kay's death the house passed to his daughters, Mrs Crosland and Mrs Mason and was occupied by Lieutenant Colonel and Mrs J.C.H. Crosland. On Mrs Crosland's death it was inherited by her niece, Miss E.F. Dixon Mason, in 1964. She sold the house and 20 acres in 1965 to Mr and Mrs Chance. In 1979 the National Trust accepted Miss Mason's testamentary bequest of 870 acres of the estate. Mr and Mrs Chance then gave (in 1980) the house and their 20 acres to the National Trust, they being allowed to remain at Colby Lodge for the rest of their lives. Mrs Chance died shortly afterwards and Mr Chance in 1984.

Colby Lodge has seen many changes and improvements in recent years so that it now appears as an elegant three-storeyed, rendered Georgian house, with sash windows, topped by a hipped, slate, roof. The present 'carriage entrance' from the gravelled forecourt is on the north side of the house, where there is a semi-circular, columned, stone portico which was added in 1991 and replaced a porch erected in about 1965 by the Chances. Also to the north of the house is a very much lower block, converted from three to two storeys by the Chances. This is the pre-Colby farmhouse which, until the Chance ownership, was not integral with the main block. The west face includes a handsome, round-topped window which extends to two-storeys. It has been suggested that the architect John Nash had a hand in the design of the main house but this is unlikely as Nash had already left Wales before it was built. The only features with Nash overtones - Corinthian columns and an elliptical wall in one room - could have been copied from the library at Ffynone, which was designed by Nash.

The original entrance was on the south side, where the drive used to sweep around the house to a gravelled turning circle, in the centre of which was a fountain, installed by the Chances, probably in the late 1960s. Photographs from the early twentieth century show a basin but no fountain. The access to the house from this forecourt was up one of the matched pair of curving steps. The door is surrounded by square, classical, architraves. Above the door a long, square-headed window extends to two floors. The present owners have done much to harmonise the architecture of the house. For example, the windows on the north side have been given architraves matching those on the south and west fronts.

To the east of the house is a range of one and two-storeyed, utilitarian stone buildings which are presently used by the National Trust as shops, tea rooms and for their plant sales.

The walled garden and garden surrounding the house dates to about 1803; the landscaped gardens evolved post mid nineteenth century, with the woodland garden being created at the end of the nineteenth century. From 1965 until 1984 the gardens

were restored and embellished.

The gardens occupy a small, 'U' shaped valley that runs south from the Lodge to the coast at Amroth. The site is approached from a minor local road off the main Pembroke trunk road, the A477. The whole coastal area of this part of Pembrokeshire is one of ancient and established settlement; a Roman building is recorded a short distance to the east, as are earlier and later settlements. To the south-west are Saundersfoot and Tenby and between are settlements which may have ancient foundations. The topography and geology of the region is complex. The whole area is one of small valleys and outcrops of resistant rocks; this combination giving rise to the dramatic coastal scenery. There are also outcrops of coal. The Colby interest in the Skyrme estate was initiated by the nearby colliery. From 1806 or 1807, the family enjoyed the profits from the anthracite that was extracted from Redlangoige colliery. A map of 1813 names the Colby colliery as 'Hill'; the rest of the collieries on the map belonged to Lord Milford. Today, within the woods, there are still vestiges of this industrial past.

The grounds consist of three main elements, the more intensely cultivated areas of garden around the house and the walled garden; the woodland gardens which occupy the west and east-facing slopes of the valley and finally the flat, somewhat parkish, valley floor. One of the drives to the house is cut into the western-facing hillside immediately above this small 'park'.

Colby Lodge could be approached from either the north or the south; from the north there was and still is, just a short drive from the public road. From the south, it would seem that there was at one time, a choice of routes. The First Edition Ordnance Survey map indicates that the house could have been approached either from Amroth, along drives on the eastern side of the valley or from the minor road which eventually leads to Summerhill.

The south drive appears to begin a few hundred metres to the north-west of Amroth, just beyond a group of cottages. One of these buildings might, at one time, have been a lodge, but they are now so altered that the original purpose is unclear. The gravelled drive passes through a pair of stone gate posts which stand to nearly 1.5 m. These are essentially unfashioned slabs but they still retain their metal fixings. The drive follows the 20 m contour up the east side of the valley. At SN 1583 0782 the drive forks, with a less imposing route heading to the east. The early survey shows two forks to the east at this junction, but there is little evidence that the upper route ever existed; the main drive is, and as far as can be judged always was, the lower route shown on the map. Just beyond this junction are two circular 'Pembrokeshire' gate piers which stand to about 2 m; hanging from the eastern pier is a green painted iron gate.

Immediately beyond, to the north of, this entrance, the National Trust is restoring the revetment wall and it has been recently capped in stone and cement mortar. As the drive approaches the house, the revetment wall rises above ground level to stand proud of the driveway to an average height of 1 m. A little further to the north of a modern public entrance to the meadow and park is the main entrance to Colby Lodge. Here the drive widens and is joined by one of the earlier forks to the east. The former revetment wall now stands to 1.5 m and is more finely built to include a string course beneath the stone and cement mortar cap. The entrance is marked by a curved recess of the wall and two square gate piers, which stand to just over 1.5 m. Between the piers hangs a fine black wrought iron gate, which is of identical design to the gate associated with the northern drive. Within the curtilage of

the house the subsequent section of the drive is grassed over, although still traceable as an earthwork.

The upper of the eastern forks, which is the only one still passable, climbs diagonally up the side of the valley side until SN 1594 0806, from where it descends towards the house in a series of bends and loops. Set as decorative features some 30 m apart are two identical sets of gate piers, complete with their gates. These handsome gates were originally manufactured for Sion House, Tenby, which burnt down in 1938 and Mr Chance had them brought to Colby about thirty years after the disaster. Although now serving no practical purpose, Mr Chance had suitable, square rendered pillars, which stand to 2.23 m, constructed. These he topped with replicas of lamps he had seen and liked in London.

At the entrance to the north drive are two square gate piers of well-cut, coursed grey stone; both stand to 2 m. Between hangs a fine iron gate of similar design to that at the southern entrance. The short gravel drive opens, after a few metres, to a forecourt to the north of the house. The 1899 survey shows the drive then sweeping to the south of the house and on to the turning circle with round basin. This part of the drive is now disused and has either been incorporated into plantings schemes or grassed over.

Much of the garden associated with the house has evolved from part of the former south drive. The borders surrounding the drive to the north of the house are mainly planted with hardy shrubs, laurels, hydrangeas and such; whilst to the south, the plantings are very much more exotic with a huge *Yucca gloriosa*, cistus, phormiums and palms. Within the lawn area which was the turning circle of the previous drive, is a lead fountain installed by the Chances in the late 1960s. It consists of an upper scalloped dish with a central jet of water; the dish is held aloft by a cherub. The cherub stands on a lower scalloped dish, somewhat larger than the first; below this dish are the three dolphins which form the base. The whole stands to about 1.5 m and is set in a circular basin with a carved stone rim. An area of random stone paving now surrounds this feature. There are two further ornaments in this area of the garden. Again in lead, about 2.25 m high, and set on stone pedestals some 15 m apart, are the romanticised figures of a boy and a girl. The fountain and figures are twentieth-century copies of eighteenth-century originals by Crowthers of Syon, London.

To the west of the house is a further garden area which is partially shaded by a mature beech. Narrow gravel paths wind through this area and lead to the public area of the gardens. At SN 1565 0806 is a plain, stone, garden shed. This building was extant in 1889 and was formerly the privy. The early survey also records a footbridge crossing the stream a short distance to the south. The present bridge is modern and constructed in 1986 by the National Trust. Another, a short distance upstream, by the former privy, was built at the same time.

To the south, the garden is separated from the parkish meadow and valley floor by a curving ha-ha, with its ditch towards the south, meadow, side. The ha-ha has been recently repaired and, in places, rebuilt. It stands, on average, to 1.25 m and is of unworked, stone blocks.

The walled garden is a somewhat irregular shape with five stretches of stone rubble walling enclosing less than an acre. The pentagon shape of the garden is that of an envelope with open flap, the point of the flap being towards the south. The tithe map shows a rectangular building within, but this has now gone. The 1889 survey shows a small, almost square area of glass in the south-west corner, against the north wall, a flight of steps to the north of the western wall and a single path around the

perimeter. Today this garden is more complex and is used only for amenity purposes.

The entrance to the garden is still via the flight of six steps through an arched entrance in the west wall, which mostly stands to over 3 m. On the western side of this wall, that is, opposite the National Trust tea rooms, is a stone cistern or water trough. This has been constructed in excavations into the raised ground level of within the walled garden and appears on this side only. Over the trough, which is a little over 1.5 m long, is a flat topped arch, just over 1 m high. At the back is one of the bronzes placed here by Mr Chance.

According to the present owners, when they took over the site in 1986 the garden still had the remnants of a grid plan of paths, but it was essentially overgrown and featureless, except for the gazebo in the north-west corner. Mr and Mrs Chance had commissioned a local architect, Wyn Jones, to design and build the octagonal gazebo in the mid 1970s. This gazebo appears to be a splendidly whimsical modern building, but the architectural style draws on the traditions of the past (mainly Victorian Gothic) and it is entirely functional, still being used for dinner parties. It is mainly painted white, with a copper cone-shaped roof with a gold coloured tall spike finial in the centre. The interior has trompe l'oeil decoration.

There is a straight path from the entrance gate to the gazebo. To the left (north) are a small lead cistern and urns, above which is a modern glasshouse in the same position as that shown in 1889. In this area of the garden the plant material includes *Magnolia soulangeana*, *Helleborus orientalis* and other varieties, *Meconopsis cambrica*, *Pyracantha* and roses. To the north-east of the glasshouse, the path is bisected by a slate rill about 8.5 m long, which terminates in a small slate-lined pond at its southern (downslope) end. The rill is fed from a lion's head spout in a semi-circular cistern in the retaining wall of the gazebo platform. The water is then piped under the path and into the rill. The south-facing border to the left of the rill includes some tender plants such as *Melianthus major*, *Cistus*, *Hibiscus syriacus*, *Abutilon*, *Feijoa sellowiana*, *Passiflora caerulea* and many more. To the south of the rill are alpine plants.

The remainder of the garden is informally divided into areas of varying formality. There is a small fuchsia garden, an informal orchard area, a hebe walk and, against the east wall 'huts' that were once the site of the compost bins.

On both the east and west-facing slopes of the valley are walks and paths through the woods; those on the east appear to be restricted to the former drives. Also on the eastern side is the monument to Mr Peter Chance. The monument has been placed on a levelled platform within the woodland (which is mainly oak and exotic conifers), just off the winding eastern drive and takes the form of a stone obelisk about 3 m high. The obelisk has been placed on a plinth some 1.5 m high. Between the obelisk and the plinth is a moulded stone collar. Also on the levelled platform are two wrought iron benches. The original concept behind placing the monument in this spot was that the monument to Mr Chance is directly opposite the memorial to Mrs Chance on the western side of the valley; the intention was that the monuments should be viewed from each other. Tree growth means that this is not now possible.

The character of the woodland on the east-facing, western side of the valley is rather different. Towards the north of this area and closer to the house, the lowest areas of the hillside are now covered with exotics such as eucalyptus, embotrium and arbutus. Exotic shrubs have been planted to complement taller woody species; there are a great many rhododendrons (species and hardy hybrids) in addition to hydrangeas, pieris and other shrubs. These plantings were begun by Mr Samuel Kay at the end of

the nineteenth century. The 1889 survey shows two major pathways through the woods, one which follows the 50 m contour above the valley floor and one which traverses the hillside towards an old mine shaft at SN 1561 0792. These paths still exist. The network of paths in use today, which incorporates the two original paths, was designed by Colonel and Mrs Crosland, the daughter and son-in-law of the Kays. These paths were made using wooden risers for the many flights of steps. The construction of the small wooden Swiss chalet-style summerhouse at SN 1563 0765, above and overlooking the valley, dates from 1932. The date and the Croslands' initials are extant on a plaque carved by Colonel Crosland. After Miss Mason's death and a storm which did extensive damage in the early 1980s Peter Chance gave the National Trust a large sum of money to replant the rhododendrons in this area.

A little to the north and east of two small, circular ponds is the memorial to Mrs Chance, who died in 1981. This memorial consists of seven vertical black painted wrought iron posts which are some 3 m high and placed to form a heptagon. All the posts are set on square concrete plinths which are themselves about a metre tall. In the centre is a slate plaque to the memory of Mrs Chance. The memorial has now become a delightful pergola with climbing shrubs, such as honeysuckle and *Clematis montana*, being encouraged up and around the posts. Apparently the original intention was to erect a neo-classical temple and Mr Chance had located a suitable structure. Unfortunately this disintegrated during the move and Mr Chance had the present 'temple' erected instead. The memorial to Mr Chance, mentioned above, is directly across the valley.

In contrast to the lower slopes, the upper areas of the hillside retain their cover of oaks with the occasional exotic conifer. The whole area of woodland occupies some eighteen acres of which about seven acres is included within the woodland walks. On the east side, the woodland area extends along the valley side, about six acres of woodland can be accessed from the walks.

The meadowlands extend down the valley from the Lodge and cover about nine acres. Almost bisecting the meadow is a small un-named stream. About 250 m south of the Lodge, adjacent to the stream, is a group of immature conifers which are next to a small, almost circular pond that is probably about 9 m in diameter. This pond is now a little silted and marginal plants are beginning to invade. In the shade of the alders and to the north of them, so that it is visible from the house, is a classical urn, set on a square concrete pedestal; the whole standing to 1.25 m. Until recently, the sweep of the meadow to the south was interrupted by a line of conifers; these have now been removed. The meadow is either grazed or mown so that it contrasts well with the wooded valley sides.

Sources

Primary

Information file in the National Monuments Record, Aberystwyth.

Tithe Award Survey and Schedule of Apportionments, (c 1835): National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

Dyfed Archaeological Trust, PRN 6464.

Secondary

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National Trust, *Colby woodland garden and estate*, undated information leaflet.
Scourfield Lewis C, *The walled garden at Colby*, (1993).
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