

PLAS DINAM

Ref No	PGW (Po) 25 (POW)
OS Map	136
Grid Ref	SO 029892
Former County	Powys
Unitary Authority	Powys
District	Montgomeryshire
Community Council	Llandinam
Designations	Listed Building: House Grade II, Lodge Grade II, Entrance and flanking wall to lodge Grade II.
Site Evaluation	Grade II
Primary reasons for grading	Interesting example of late nineteenth-century house and garden in fine valley setting. House attributed to a colleague of W. E. Nesfield. Good arboricultural interest in garden. Tree planted lawns.
Type of Site	House and garden, limited attached paddocks; no park.
Main Phases of Construction	c. 1870

SITE DESCRIPTION

Plas Dinam is set on a rise looking south down the Severn valley towards Llanidloes. It is approached by a long drive which runs up from the west side of a lodge off the A 470 road. The ground rises to the south towards the house. On the west of the site a bank above the road steadily increases in height to the south following the rise of the ground level from the north, up towards the house. This bank is retained to the west of the lodge by a length of stone wall which gives way to a hanging wood and grass bank above the road. From the lodge the drive heads straight for about 100m towards a garage/stable before curving back to the north-east around the northern edge of the garden to approach the house about 50m to the south-east.

The family house is a irregular building in roof line, bays and height and it displays eclectic architectural influences. It is built of stone, render and red brick. The main two-storey west block of the house illustrates the revival of the domestic medieval style, with a steep pitched,

low gabled slate roof and brick stacks. On the north front there is a large two-storey stone and timber projecting porch ornamented with a Tudor stone arch on the ground floor and a deeply recessed door with pargetting and latticed windows above. A narrow tower is inserted into the roof on the south-west of the porch. The upper storey of the south front is slate hung with dormers in the roof. The north porch is reflected in a large projecting two-storey, five-sided bay on the south front. To the east of this bay a narrow raised stone terrace runs along the south front to connect with a recent glassed-in garden room, the old housekeeper's room. A timber door and a set of seven steps connect the terrace with the main house. The main block of the house is ornamented with lead downpipes set with the initials 'CR'. To the east is a simpler two-storey service wing, part of which includes a brick Dutch gable. This wing is hidden from the main house by laurel and other planting on both the north and south sides. The Estate Office is located in the south side of this wing.

Plas Dinam was built on a greenfield site in about 1873 by the office of W. E. Nesfield for Captain J. O. Crewe-Read. The Crewe-Reads owned the old late seventeenth-century Llandinam Hall on the flood plain of the Severn about 1km to the north-west. By 1870 they had already moved the Home Farm, Ty'n-y-maen, up the hill to the east of the site of the new house. At the close of the nineteenth century both of the houses, Llandinam Hall and Plas Dinam, and the associated estate were bought by David Davies, the great south Wales industrialist who had made a fortune in the Ocean Collieries of the Rhondda valley and the railways. In the mid nineteenth century he had built an Italianate house, Broneirion, which stands opposite Plas Dinam on the west bank of the Severn, for himself. Plas Dinam was bought for his son Edward and family.

Formal gardens were made and tree planting was carried out around the house as soon as it was built. In 1926 the architect E. S. Hall extended the house to the north-west, erecting the tower. This part of the house was renovated in 1982 and the work is commemorated by a inscribed stone plaque set into the upper wall. The house remained was by the family until it was provided in the Second World War as an evacuation home for Gordonston School. After the war it became a Ministry of Agriculture training centre for the Land Army. Prefabricated school rooms and dormitories erected in the gardens survive from this period. The family was finally able to take back a deteriorated house and garden in 1956 and, having restored them, have created a family home.

About 70m to the north-west of the house there is a stable/garage court. This was built as stables in c. 1873 but the east part was later converted into garages, with a chauffeur's flat taking over from the groom's accommodation. The main Crewe-Read and Davies stabling remained at Llandinam Hall until about 1940. The stable block is quite small and it faces north, looking down the drive. It is executed in grey local stone with a slate roof and it has small two-storey buildings on the east which were staff accommodation. The existing arrangement of the buildings was recorded on the 1884 Ordnance Survey map. A screen wall connects the two sides on the south and two small screen walls, which are about 1.7m high, run from the east and west buildings to a central pair of stone gate piers, about 2m high, either side of a wide pair of white timber gates. The interior of the court is surfaced in concrete. A steel and glass roof has been erected overhead to protect it. On the west side of the block, between the west wall and the steep bank with the hanging wood, a track or old service drive leads through between two sets of stone gate piers to the south. On the west of this drive a

third stone wall which creates another enclosure, whose original use is unclear.

The gardens and grounds of Plas Dinam cover about five acres and lie mainly to the north and south of the house on ground which slopes up to the east. An additional area of approximately 10 acres lies beyond this, on both the north and south, extending to the upper lane to the north and south to the village. This land is pasture and is surrounded with hedges and some trees such as Scots pine. The only obvious example of ornamental planting is in the south-east of the north paddock where a small circular stand of acers is surrounded by iron fencing.

The drive runs southwards from the entrance, to the west of the lodge, then curves around to the north-east to approach the house from the north. The lodge is a two-storey stone building in a similar style to the house, with a two-storey porch on its west side, its upper storey timber-framed and jettied over the doorway. The garden to the north of the house takes the form of a tree planted lawn. This lawn sweeps down from the house to the drive, and beyond for about 4m, to the garden boundary. On the lawn a mature cedar and tulip tree grow just to the south of the drive. Circular beds of azaleas and individual thujas, lawson cypress, chestnut, acer and yew also occur on the lawn which connects to the stable/garage in the east. On the east of the drive as it approaches the house the ground rises to a large flat level terrace about 3m above the level of the ground below. This covers about 1/2 acre and is surrounded by a simple timber fence on the south and west. A second bank rises on the east up to the east garden boundary along the Ty'n-y-maen lane. Trees, laurel and rhododendron grow along this bank and beehives are located here. A small vegetable garden has been created at the southern end of this terrace, the rest is grass. On the south-west a hedge of rugosa roses screens the area from the forecourt below. Laurel and rhododendron also grow along the bank between the drive and the terrace. To the north-west of the terrace a path runs east from the drive along the north boundary of the garden. This path runs beneath a high earth and laurel bank on the south before finally emerging at the north-east end of the terrace. A 'Japanese Wood' was established to the east of the lane bounding the east side of the garden in the late nineteenth-century.

A wide rectangular gravelled forecourt runs the length of the north front of the house. To the east a service drive breaks off from the forecourt to proceed to the east to the staff wing. The drive proceeds uphill in a diagonal line between a pair of clipped laurel hedges to the south-east to emerge on to the lane opposite the entrance to the farm. A simple timber gate is set at this entrance. On the corner of the forecourt and service drive, to the north-east, there is an earth bank retained around its base by inset smooth river stones. This bank is planted with laurel and it backs on to a small area of formal garden to the south-west of the upper terrace. A small area of lawn is enclosed by mature shrub planting which includes a pair of topiary yews on the south. On the north-west of this area a random paved path connects back down to the forecourt in the south-west through a small area of rock garden planted up with succulents and alpines. The forecourt is enclosed on the west by a capped stone wall which is partly hidden below cotoneaster. Below and to the west of this there is an informal rectangular area of lawn defined by a continuation of the wall along its south side and by two sets of stone steps on the south-east and south-west, of six and twelve steps respectively, which connect it to the level of the formal garden above. A bed of rugosa roses runs along the north side of the south wall.

In the south-west of the forecourt a stone path runs alongside the house to the south of the west wall to connect with a formal square garden on the west of the house. This garden is surrounded by stone walls on the north, west and south and is composed of a square lawn with a central stone planter set in a circular rose bed which is about 2.5m across. The path continues around the west side of the house, separated from it by planting, before continuing along the length of the south front. On the south front there is a large rectangular lawn which is again surrounded by a dressed stone wall, on its west, south and part of its east side. A grass terrace continues the line of the east wall, north to the house. A set of six stone steps descends from the terrace on to the lawn in the south-east corner. Within these walls there is a large level lawn in the centre of which there is a shallow circular depression marking the position of former flowerbeds. Ten steps lead down from the north-west corner of the lawn to a path running below the west wall. At this point the south lawn is about 2m above this path. A small area of planting runs along the bottom of the wall. To the west is a lower, wide rectangular grass terrace, the site of a former lawn tennis court. From this point a bank of heathers planted below the west wall of the west garden can be seen.

To the south of the south lawn, between the wall and south garden boundary there is a wide strip of grass. This grass continues to the east where it merges into an area of shrubbery and new island beds to the east of the south lawn, and south-east of the house. A shelter and dovecote are located in this area, which is screened by planting from one of the remaining prefabricated school buildings, situated between the garden and the east boundary hedge of the site. To the north-west of the building a small single free standing garage stands on the east end of the house. To the west of the south-west grass terrace a path runs diagonally south-westwards across a tree planted lawn. About 10m to the west of this path there is a hard tennis court on a terrace cut out of the ground which slopes to the south-west. The path continues past the tennis court beneath some mature redwoods and yews to enter a narrow strip of woodland of a variety of native and introduced trees on the west side of the south paddock, which continues for about 200m to the village in the south. This path is partly edged with stone and clinker and crosses over two small timber bridges. At the southern end the path emerges from a iron gate, set in a length of iron railings and laurel, which creates the south boundary of the site. Above and to the north of the tennis court at the back of the stable/garage there is a small yard containing two free-standing single aisled greenhouses and at least two sets of cold frames. Only one of the greenhouses is in use, the other and the frames are derelict. On the south of this area there is an open-fronted shed and on the north-west a small brick building which may have been a bothy.

The gardens date from the construction of the house and the formal areas were probably designed by the Nesfield office. On the 1884 Ordnance Survey map form of the garden area is much as it is today. Terraces lie to the north-west, south-west and south of the house. The walls around the terraces are marked. A feature, possibly planting or a fountain basin, is also marked in the centre of the south terrace. It is known that a rose garden was located in this area until about 1950. The gardens to the west of the house appear to have been more heavily planted at this time and a number of paths run through the area. To the north of the house the garden boundary appears to have run along the north side of the north-west terrace, the lawn to the drive and the drive being in the north paddock. At this time this area appears more 'park like' with individual trees and a narrow belt along the north boundary in addition to the

woodland along the north-west drive. To the south the garden was also smaller; it appears to have ended just beyond the south wall of the south lawn. Again this area of the garden was more heavily wooded and beyond a footpath, which ran along the south side of the garden, there was a curving paddock/garden woodland boundary which was ornamented in the paddock by two individual trees set into the curves. A conifer stand was also recorded to the south-east of the house on the site of the later prefabricated buildings. The garden remained much the same between 1884 and 1903 with the major exception of the extension of the north garden boundary into the park to incorporate the drive and the area to the east which was planted up as a Japanese Wood. Since 1903 the woodland along the south path has also gradually extended to run the entire length in contrast to the short length of woodland along the upper part of this path recorded in 1884. Between about 1940-1956 the gardens were affected through the change of use of the site, a lot of tree planting in the garden was lost and the grounds were simplified and declined as the number of garden staff also declined. Part of the Japanese Wood, which is believed to have been planted after 1900, was cleared and a level terrace created for the school and Land Army buildings and trees were removed from the south garden creating an open view to the south. From 1956 greenhouses were moved from the kitchen garden to the south of the stables/garage and in the 1960s a tennis court was constructed to the south of these.

Sources

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Haslam, R., The Buildings of Powys (1979), p. 122.