

ERDDIG

Ref No	PGW (C) 62
OS Map	117
Grid Ref	SJ 326 482
County	Wrexham
District	Wrexham

Community Council Marchwiel

Designations Listed building: Erddig Grade I
Scheduled Ancient Monument (De 17; De 152)

Site Evaluation Grade I

Primary reasons for grading

Outstanding example of a grand formal garden in the Dutch style, of the late seventeenth-early eighteenth century. Its main features survive unaltered, and have been well restored. Park landscaped by William Emes, with an unusual water feature, the cup-and-saucer, and some tree planting remaining.

Type of Site

Formal garden; landscape park

Main Phases of Construction

1684-87; 1720s; 1770s

SITE DESCRIPTION

Erddig is a substantial, plain, brick house situated on the western edge of a bluff between the Black Brook valley to the west and the Clywedog valley to the north. To its west the ground drops steeply, whereas to the east is a gently undulating plateau.

The central nine bays of the house were built in 1684-87 by Joshua Edisbury. The design was by Thomas Webb of Middlewich. This part has two storeys, a basement, and a steeply pitched roof with dormer windows, which was originally topped by a cupola. In the 1720s John Meller, a London lawyer who had bought Erddig in 1716, added five-bay two-storey brick extensions to the north and south, and changed the mullioned and transomed windows of Edisbury's house to sash windows. The east front has remained more or less unaltered, except for the central steps down into the garden, which were added in about 1861-63.

In 1733, on the death of John Meller, Erddig passed to his nephew Simon Yorke, and remained in the Yorke family, by direct descent, until 1973, when it was given by the last Philip Yorke to the National Trust. After 1733 the main period of alteration was the 1770s, when Philip Yorke made alterations to both house and park. The west front of the house was encased in stone and given a central pediment in 1772-73, to the design of local architects Mr Frank, William Turner and Joseph Turner. A curving double flight of steps was added in front of the central door.

To the south of the house is an irregular group of brick outbuildings, some arranged around the estate yard. Buildings include a joiners' shop, joiners' store, sawpit, blacksmith's shop and paint store. Most date from the early nineteenth century. Immediately to the south of the house is the stable yard, entered under a rusticated and pedimented arch on the west side, was built by Philip Yorke, and dates to 1774. In the kitchen yard to the east of the stables is a small cupola, with a wooden domed top, overhanging eaves and weather vane. This came from Stansty Park, Gwersyllt, and was erected here in 1913. It is now used as a log store.

The park is situated just to the south of Wrexham, in a former coal-mining area. It occupies two valleys, that of the Black Brook to the west of the house, and that of the Clywedog river to the north, forming an L-shaped area. The house lies on the western edge of the higher ground, and from its west front there are fine views out over the park in the Black Brook valley. The ground drops steeply down to the valleys to the west and north of the house but rises more gently on their far sides. There are two main entrances to the park, both with lodges. The first lies to the south-west of the house, off the Hafod road, and the second is situated to the south-east of the house off the Sontley road. The latter is more imposing, with stone piers and iron gates; the former has simple wooden piers and gates. On the north side of the park a former drive, now a farm track, leads from the west front of the house to the former Coed-y-glyn entrance (now for pedestrians only). The lodge has gone, and only two stone gate piers remain.

The south-west drive winds past two houses, Plas Grono and Bryn-goleu, to a small lodge on the plateau above the Black Brook. It then continues northwards to simple iron gates flanked by stone piers with ornamental carved panels, leading to the west front of the house, to the outbuildings, and to the National Trust car park. On the west side of the house is a small gravel forecourt, below which is a steep grass slope down to the Black Brook valley. The south-east drive branches off this drive, just south of the buildings, and runs south-eastwards across the plateau between rows of large mature wellingtonias, recently interplanted with monkey puzzles. The drive then runs through Forest Wood, a semi-natural mainly deciduous woodland, to the east of which it is again flanked by rows of wellingtonias up to the entrance.

The park falls into four main areas: the plateau, the woodland north of the garden, the Black Brook valley, and the Clywedog valley. The plateau lies to the south and south-east of the house. It is largely open grassland, with scattered isolated deciduous and coniferous trees, mainly oaks, with two isolated wellingtonias and one cedar. Some mediaeval ridge-and-furrow is preserved in the grassland. Along the west side, where the ground drops steeply to the Black Brook valley, is deciduous semi-natural woodland, with many large

planted beech trees. To the south of the garden is a large brick octagonal dovecote, in existence by 1739.

The woodland area to the north of the garden is deciduous and coniferous, including large sycamores, beeches, pines, yews and hollies, with some laurel underplanting. Within in are some winding earthen paths, and a straight walk, now rather overgrown, leading north from the central gate on the north side of the garden. A walk runs along the east side of the wood, and along the top of the wooded slope down to the Clywedog river. This is flanked by large planted beeches and sweet chestnuts. At the northern end of the wood is a steep-sided promontory above the confluence of the two rivers, on top of which is a mediaeval motte and bailey castle. This consists of a steep-sided oval mound, the motte, at the tip of the promontory, and a larger, flat-topped area to its south with deeply cut ditches to its north and south. A linear earthwork, Wat's Dyke, runs along the top of the slope down to the Black Brook. Winding earthen paths lead to the motte and bailey, and the centre of the top of the bailey has been cleared as a wide grass alley flanked by rows of beeches.

The Black Brook winds through a small valley whose steep eastern side is wooded, while the valley floor is largely open pasture with a few scattered trees. The rising ground to the west is ornamented with single trees and clumps, including oaks, sycamores, horse chestnuts and copper beeches. The stream divides, the western branch leading to an ornamental water feature known as the cup and saucer. This is a circular shallow pool in the centre of which is a cylindrical vertical drop down which the water pours. The stream emerges beneath a stone arch and shortly rejoins the other branch, which just before the confluence is led over two weirs and steps in a stone-lined channel. Between the two is a hydraulic ram, installed in 1900, which pumps water up to the house. The old north drive crosses the stream over a stone bridge; at the foot of the steep slope there is a simple iron gate across it, flanked by stone piers similar to those at the south end of the forecourt.

The Clywedog valley is largely open grassland, with a few isolated deciduous trees in the valley floor. The flanks of the valley are wooded with semi-natural deciduous woodland. The old north drive crosses the river over a single-arched stone bridge. The river hugs the southern side of the valley, and passes over several weirs. Towards the east end of the park a mill race is diverted off it on its north side.

The park was first laid out by John Meller between 1718 and 1733, at the same time as the formal gardens were made. It is shown in a bird's eye view drawing by Thomas Badeslade of 1740. To the north of the garden is an open area planted with formal plantations of conifers and deciduous trees next to the garden, an east-west row of deciduous trees and further away a parallel row of conifers. The hanging woods on the sides of the valleys are shown, but to the north of the garden they are cut into formal walks and steps leading to the motte, on top of which is a circular battlemented building, and to the bailey, on top of which is a bowling green with ramps at the west end. The north drive is shown, crossing the two rivers over bridges where the present ones are, and flanked by rows of conifers. The drive leads up the slope to the west front of the house, where there is a small formal walled and railed forecourt, with central gates supplied by Robert Davies. Just south of the bridge over the Black Brook is a small building and rectangular pool, the 'Cold Bath'. The Black Brook is shown hugging the foot of the slope below the house, while the Clywedog

winds all over the valley floor to the east of the north drive bridge. A mill race and mill and shown to the east of the bridge.

Between 1767 and 1789 the park was landscaped by William Emes for Philip Yorke. Although the basic configuration remained all formality was removed, and much tree planting took place. Most of the landscaping took place to the west of the house. The forecourt with its Davies gates was removed, as was the Cold Bath. The trees on the western flank of the Black Brook valley are probably remnants of Emes's plantings, as are many of the beeches in the woodland above. The walks in the wood to the north of the house were softened and new picturesque ones added. The bowling green was allowed to remain, and was planted as a beech avenue, known as the cathedral aisle, in the 1770s. New channels were dug for the two rivers, and in 1774 the Cup and Saucer was built by Emes. The gatepiers on the north drive, and at the south end of the forecourt, may date to about 1780.

Nineteenth-century planting in the park is attested by the wellingtonias flanking the east drive, by the copper beeches, and by rhododendrons on either side of the grass slope west of the house. Features that have disappeared are two 'china houses', one on the east side of the wood to the north of the garden, and one towards the east end of the Coed-y-glyn wood on the north side of the park. Both survived to within living memory, and were small pavilions decorated inside with glazed tiles. Also gone is a Coade Stone statue of a 'Druid' which was situated in the wood north of the garden, near the motte. This is now in a fragmentary state in an outbuilding. In 1908 the gates attributed to Davies that are now at the east end of the garden were brought from Stansty Park and erected at the East Lodge. When these were removed to the garden they were replaced by gates dated 1902 from the Coed-y-glyn entrance.

The garden lies on level ground to the east of the house. It is rectangular in shape, enclosed by high brick walls, with a small walled garden, the Rose Garden, in the north-west corner. Next to the house the garden is narrowed to slightly less than the length of the house by projecting walls and brick pavilions. In the corners of the walls are corner alcove seats. Both eastern corners of the garden also have brick alcove seats, and there is another at the west end of the southern east-west path.

The garden's main feature is the east-west axis, aligned on the centre of the house, of a wide gravel path leading to a long narrow canal flanked by rows of limes. The axis is terminated by iron gates and screens, attributed to Robert Davies, which were erected here during the 1970s restoration. A smaller rectangular pond lies to the north of the canal. Wide, straight gravel paths across the main axis, around the walls, and down the centre of the southern half of the garden complete the structural layout of the garden. The southern path is terminated by an alcove seat at the west end and gates at the east end. The cross path at the head of the canal terminates at its north end with gates leading to a straight walk in the woodland beyond. The ground drops slightly below the western cross path, and the ground has been levelled below it to give a level lawn.

A garden was first made here by Joshua Edisbury in 1684-87. This went with the first, smaller house, and was a small, walled formal garden divided into a forecourt and several compartments, laid out with square or rectangular beds and rows of trees. Its eastern

boundary is marked today by the drop in level opposite the two stone pinnacles from Wrexham church. This garden was removed by John Meller, who made the present garden in 1718-33. The garden was extended eastwards, and an undated plan attributed to Stephen Switzer shows the proposed layout for this new area. The main features of this plan - the central canal, pond to the north, paths, walls and alcove-shaped hedges in the north-east corner seem to have been carried out, but the mount at the foot of the canal, and elaborate wilderness to the south were probably never implemented. The garden layout is shown in an engraving of 1740 of a 1739 drawing by Thomas Badeslade. This shows that there were originally walls flanking the main axis: these were demolished later in the eighteenth century. After Meller's death, although minor alterations and additions were made from time to time the garden remained basically unchanged. When the National Trust took over the garden it was in a run-down, neglected state, and much work was done in the 1970s to restore its main elements. Planting has been carried out to be in keeping with the character of the various parts of the garden.

Next to the house the main central path is flanked by two Edwardian parterres of small rectilinear beds cut out of the lawn, clipped box bushes, and central stalagmitic fountains in scalloped pools. These were installed in 1861, and are by Blashfields of Grantham. The original terracotta basins by Blashfords were removed to the Moss Walk in 1900-10 and were replaced by the present stone ones. The walls flanking the parterres were partly demolished in 1898, and the remaining sections were given cusped gables in 1912-13. Gateways in the north and south walls of the west part of the garden lead respectively to the Rose Garden and the kitchen yard.

A baluster sundial from nearby Plas Grono stands at the crossing of the main axis and cross path. Just below it, flanking the main axis, are two cast-iron vases on stone bases. These were a wedding present to Simon Yorke III (1811-94) and Victoria Cust, and until about 1900 stood on the path. At this point there is a slight scarp, and below the central gravel path is flanked by lawns and double rows of pleached limes, planted in the 1970s restoration. These mark the position of the walls which originally flanked the main axis. A further low scarp in the lawn marks the eastern boundary of Edisbury's garden. The path here is flanked by two large pinnacles taken from Wrexham church.

The main axis is terminated by the canal, flanked by narrow lawns and double rows of tall limes. These are not shown on the Badeslade engraving, but are thought to be an early feature, probably originally pleached. At the east end of the canal are fine wrought iron gates and screens. These were erected here in 1977, having been moved first from Stansty Park in 1908 to the Forest Lodge of the park. They are attributed to Robert Davies, who is known to have provided wrought iron for Erddig in the 1720s (probably for the gates and screens shown in the Badeslade engraving on the west front of the house). The screens are flanked by two earthen mounds made from dredgings of the pond in the 1970s. The Badeslade engraving shows only two piers set wide apart here; the space between may therefore have originally been just a drop to the ditch outside, giving a clear view of the park beyond.

The northern part of the garden is occupied by rows of fruit trees and yew hedging in the western half, and by the smaller pond in the eastern half. This has a curious inlet in its south-west corner, with a curving brick-edged channel and stone steps. It is not shown on

the Badeslade engraving. It may be the remains of a small building, but its use is unknown, but could have been connected to any one of the following - fish management, water fowl management, swimming, paddling - or something else entirely. The pond is shown on the Badeslade engraving as walled or hedged. To the east of the pond is a curious layout of yew hedging with scalloped edges. This is a reconstruction of a feature shown on the Badeslade engraving, and its purpose is unclear. The alcoves may have been for beehives. Between the two hedges is a baluster sundial with John Meller's coat of arms engraved on it. Fruit trees have been trained up the north wall, using varieties known to have been in use in the early eighteenth century.

To the south of the canal is an area of informally planted woodland, originally largely occupied by a bowling green. The east end of the gravel walk through this side of the garden is known as the Moss Walk. At its east end delicate wrought iron gates flanked by brick piers are set into the garden wall. These early eighteenth-century gates were a wedding present to Simon Yorke III, erected here in the nineteenth century. Further west the garden has been restored to its Victorian appearance, with flowerbeds cut in the lawns, roses on pillars and ropes, and two raised beds with quatrefoil stone surrounds. The western end of the walk is flanked by Irish yews and dwarf box hedges in a chain design noted by Simon III and his wife Victoria at Versailles. A row of hollies has been planted to the south, replacing an earlier row of variegated hollies.

The Rose Garden is laid out with wavy-edged borders planted informally with trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants.

The kitchen garden lies to the south of the pleasure garden, its north wall being the south wall of the pleasure garden. It extends for half the length of the pleasure garden. The walls are c. 4 m. high, topped with flat stone coping. Along the north wall is a wall border edged with dwarf box hedging. Whitewashed areas of the wall show the positions of former glass-houses. Along the west wall are a gabled gardener's cottage and a single-storey range of bothies, parts of which are now converted to form part of the gardener's house. In the centre of the garden yew hedging surrounds all but the south side of two free-standing glass-houses. These are twentieth-century in date, and have brick bases. The rest of the interior is laid out with grass and low beech hedges. Bothies are ranged along the south wall.

To the south of the kitchen garden is a yard enclosed by a stone wall. To its east is a small pond in a lawn, with a herb border along the outside of the south wall of the kitchen garden. To the east is the car park and grass picnic area (former drying green), planted with fruit trees.

Sources

Primary

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