

## THE GARTH

<b>Ref No.</b>	<b>PGW(Po) 38 (POW)</b>
<b>OS Map</b>	126
<b>Grid Ref</b>	SJ 214106
<b>Former County</b>	Powys
<b>Unitary Authority</b>	Powys
<b>District</b>	Montgomeryshire
<b>Community Council</b>	Guilsfield
<b>Designations</b>	Listed Building: Gates and gate piers to east of house site Grade II
<b>Site Evaluation</b>	<b>Grade II</b>
<b>Primary reasons for grading</b>	Site of particularly ornate Gothick early nineteenth-century house and stables, a rare architectural commission by the garden designer and writer John Claudius Loudon. Remnants of ornamental grounds include a terrace and two lakes.
<b>Type of Site</b>	Relict site, ornamental park and garden, ruined house.
<b>Main Phases of Construction</b>	c. 1717, c. 1809-11 (Loudon)

## SITE DESCRIPTION

Originally a tall brick house of unknown appearance, the Garth was built in about 1717 two km. west of the village of Guilsfield by Richard Mytton of Pontysgryd, a member of the old border family of Mytton, who married into the wealthy Wynn family from north Wales. His grandson, the Revd Richard Mytton, made a fortune in India and on returning to Wales in the early nineteenth century commissioned the well known garden designer and writer John Claudius Loudon (1783-1843) to build a new house on the same site from 1809, possibly to compete with the grand neighbouring houses of Trawscoed Hen, Crosswood and Trelydan Hall. Loudon created an extraordinary house and outbuildings which were heavily influenced by Strawberry Hill and the Orient. His plans for the house, which have not been traced, were published either in 1811 titled 'A mansion, farmery and stables calculated to form one pile of architecture', or in 1812 as 'Observations on laying out farms in the Scotch manner, applied to England'.

The house was set on a terrace and faced east across the park. An octagonal, turreted tower stood at each corner of the two-storey building which was faced in sandstone ashlar. On the east front there was a central two-storey arched window and in the centre of the roof a raised, octagonal glass lantern. A single-storey verandah with a latticework balustrade ran around the south-east and north-east corners of the house. According to an engraving of 1847 a porte-cochere stood on the north entrance front. The windows were all of a ogee design which was reflected in a zig-zag parapet which ran around the roof. The interiors were similarly elaborate, in both Gothick and Indian styles. The house bore similarities to Thomas Johnes's fantastic mansion at Hafod and Loudon's own Hope End in Herefordshire. Lewis in his Topographical Dictionary of Wales (1842) described it as 'a modern structure in the decorated style of English architecture'. The house attracted visitors, among them Thomas Pennant who recorded a visit to the Garth in his Tour of 1778.

The house is said to have cost an estimated £100,000, which bankrupted Mytton. However it now appears that most of Mytton's money had been spent before he rebuilt the Garth and that money for the house, and other land purchases, was raised by mortgaging the estate and selling life annuities, actions which later placed the family in debt. The house is now estimated to have cost £30,000. It remained within the family but by 1939 it was too costly to maintain and was abandoned. During the Second World War the house became offices for the army who used the site as a munitions depot. Auctions followed the war when the interior fittings and materials were sold off prior to demolition in 1950-52. The site passed into the hands of the local council in 1954.

All that survives of the house is a pile of rubble within a scrub woodland. Part of the south-east tower and connecting wall still stands.

The stable block at the Garth was designed by Loudon in the same ornate style as the house. It lay about 50m to the north-west of the house. It was a large two-storey, circular building with an external veranda that ran around the bottom storey and ogee windows lighting the floor above. Around the interior wall there was a walk wide enough to exercise horses during inclement weather. The stables were demolished along with the house. All that remains is rubble and, underneath, a brick vaulted cellar in an unstable condition.

To the south of the site of the stables there are some of the brick footings of the offices, and other buildings, marked on the 1840 tithe map and the 1885 25 in. Ordnance Survey map.

From ground evidence and from an engraving of 1847 it appears that the drive to the house, and a branch off to the west to the stables, entered the area from the north-east.

The park is roughly triangular in shape and covers about 200 acres. It is enclosed on its three sides by roads. The house stood on a circular terrace towards the central western end and looked out across the majority of the park towards the village. The park is divided into fields which are enclosed either by deteriorating mixed hedges or modern stock proof fencing. To the east and north-east of the house terrace are the depressions of two drained lakes. At the northern end of the north-east lake there is a small isolated kennel block and to the west, north of the house, there is a model farm. The line of the main east drive, is still evident,

crossing the park from the village in the east, running above the east lake and approaching the house through an ornate stone gateway. Parkland trees including oaks, horse chestnut and lime survive, scattered about the park. The only plantations within the park are a small belt along the A 490 and the scrub woodland growing on the site of the house. A walled kitchen garden survives within the park to the south-west of the house site. The park is now divided into four small tenanted farms, one of which is the model farm. Other farm houses and buildings dating from the 1950s have been built inside the park on the north (Caetraws), east (Gwastad) and west (Heylin).

The early history of the park is unknown. It is presumed that its triangular shape is very old, dating from the medieval roads that ran into the village of Guilsfield from the east. The first known house on the site was erected in about 1717 but it is unknown whether any ornamental parkland was laid out at this time. There are two very old oaks in the western area of the park which could be the relic of a pre-1800 landscape but it is more likely that they are remnants of local ancient woodland or field boundaries. All of the buildings and structures within the present park, with perhaps the exception of the walled kitchen garden, date from the early 1800s and the involvement of Loudon. It is, however, unclear whether other components, the drives, the lakes, hedges and isolated trees date from this time or were already in existence. By 1840 three small plantations, as well as isolated trees, were recorded on the tithe map in the north-east and east of the park. The age of the hedges suggest that the park was farmed from the mid-nineteenth century and was not open in character. The family left the house during the 1930s and during the Second World War the park was taken over by the army. According to one local source Italian POWs were held in the south-western park towards the end of the war and, from another, that the site was a munitions depot. The gradual depletion of the park plantations, which had started in the late nineteenth century, accelerated during this period. Concrete bases for whatever purpose were removed from the park by the military after the war before it was sold to the district council. Since the 1950s the park has been split into four small holdings and in the 1970s a new playing field was created at the eastern end.

The design and position of any gardens at the Garth is difficult to ascertain. Little archive evidence seems to have survived beyond the 1840 tithe map and the 1885 25 in. Ordnance Survey map which simply record 'please grounds' and a 'shrubbery' respectively, in the area to the west of the house. No record of any lawn or flower garden has been found. It is clear that the Loudon house, and possibly the house of about 1717, was constructed on a terrace which overlooks the park to the east, standing above it by about 3m. The terrace continues around the south side of the house and extends into the park to the south-west by about 10m. A turning circle was recorded on the terrace in 1885 and it is possible that some ornamental planting was created around it. The terrace is now pasture. To the west of the house, and the south of the stables, there is a small, triangular area of land which is now planted up with young conifers. The stumps of larger trees which survive in this woodland include at least one wellingtonia. This area is still partly enclosed along its southern edge by nineteenth-century iron park railings. No identifiable 'garden' features survive in the area but about half way along the south boundary there is a regular, 1m wide, ditch, entering the 'garden' on a north-west alignment. This is probably a collapsed water pipe. A mature Cedar of Lebanon survives on the terrace to the south-east of the house. This tree is recorded in its immature state in an engraving of 1847 which suggests that it is a feature contemporary with the Loudon house. In it the terrace is grassed and the only planting recorded is a broadleaf tree to

the north-east of the house and the cedar, with what appears to be a laurel, growing on its northern side. The late Victorian 'pleasure grounds' and 'shrubbery' survived, apparently unaltered until at least 1903 when they are recorded on the Second Edition Ordnance Survey map. However, in the village there is no memory of any garden at the Garth immediately before or after the Second World War. Following the demolition of the house in the 1950s the district council planted a small conifer wood to the west of the house.

The walled kitchen garden lies to the south-west of the site of the Garth house site on a south-facing slope. The garden covers about 2 acres. Red brick walls survive around the garden standing 2.5-4m high. Along some stretches of wall stone capping survives, on others it has been lost. The north-west and north-east corners curve and were probably used as fruit walls. Nail holes cover all of the walls. Service doors are located near the north-west and north-east corners, the door in the north-west retains a wooden door, the north-east a modern wicket. A more formal central doorway with a central stone keystone detail is located in the southern wall. Internally the garden was on two levels and a wall appears to have run along this division. This wall has been virtually demolished but an overgrown fruit tree survives which was probably trained against it. In the south-east corner of the garden there is a simple, single-storey brick bothy or potting shed roofed in corrugated iron. The north wall is hollow, a heated wall, illustrated by the loss of some of the inner bricks. There is no obvious evidence of any glasshouses or lean-to frames on the interior of the garden but along the external north wall there appear to be the traces of rooflines and the footings of a stock hole/boiler house. The external heating flues are blackened with charcoal inside. Some overgrown fruit trees grow against the external west and south walls of the garden. Those on the west are lost in the roadside plantation. Standard plum or damson trees also stand on the east side of the farm track that runs down the east side of the garden. Inside the garden other overgrown fruit trees grow along the west and east walls. The interior of the garden is used as additional grazing and protection for sheep. Around the interior of the garden there are feeding troughs. The internal building is used for storage.

The date of the walled kitchen garden is unknown but it is clearly recorded as 'Garden' on the 1840 tithe map. It may predate the Loudon house but this is unclear. It does seem that the garden was relatively simple, relying on a heated wall, with limited glass, together with the other walls, to grow fruit trees. The only recorded glasshouse, a relatively small structure which stood in the north-east corner, was recorded on the 1885 25 in. Ordnance Survey map. This glasshouse had been lost by 1903. By 1885 the internal periphery paths had been laid out in the garden on both sides of the central wall. The original height of this wall is unknown. At this time shelter belts also surrounded the garden on the east and south. The garden probably began to decline after the First World War and, almost certainly, would have been abandoned by the 1950s. The internal dividing wall was demolished by the District Council in the 1980s.

## **Sources**

**Primary** 1840 tithe map. The National Library of Wales.  
Engraving by Henry Colburn, London of view from the north-west, 1847.  
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- Secondary** Haslam, R., The Buildings of Powys (1979), p.109  
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