

## **LLANNERCH HALL**

**Ref No** PGW (C) 41

**OS Map** 116

**Grid Ref** SJ 054 724

**County** Conwy

**District** Conwy

**Community Council** St Asaph

**Designations** Listed building: Llannerch Hall Grade II\*

**Site Evaluation** Grade II

### **Primary reasons for grading**

Site of one of the most famous Welsh historic gardens, created by Mutton Davies c. 1660, overlain by 1920s garden designed by Percy Cane.

### **Type of Site**

Earthworks; formal terraced garden with canal; woodland garden; walled garden.

### **Main Phases of Construction**

c. 1660; 1927-1929

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

Llannerch Hall is a tall three-storey cement rendered house with stone dressings. It stands on elevated ground in the Vale of Clwyd, above the river Clwyd to the east. The earliest building on the site was a compact, tall Jacobean house built by Sir Peter Mutton at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Although this has been swallowed up by later remodelling, the main block retains its seventeenth-century framework. The house was remodelled in about 1772 and again in 1862-64, when it took on its present appearance. The present house has stone dressings, two Ionic pillars at the front door on the south front, and a balcony and balustrading above. The second floor windows have stone pediments, whilst the other windows have stone mullions. By 1887 Llannerch was the seat of Sir George Cayley. The Cayleys were a Yorkshire family and one time owners of Ebberston Hall, on the North York Moors. By the 1920s Llannerch was the home of Captain and Mrs Piers Jones who called in Percy Cane to remodel the gardens between 1927 and 1929.

A brick built stableyard making up three sides of a courtyard is situated to the west of the house. It has all been converted to living accommodation. The date probably relates to the

1862-64 remodelling of the house. An entrance arch on the south side has stone dressings and a stone pediment, into which pigeon entrances are built.

The park at Llannerch lies to the south and south-east of the house, sloping down to the river Clwyd in the east. Part of the park adjacent to the river is taken up by a trotting track. The bank on the eastern boundary of the garden has a belt of mixed deciduous and coniferous trees. A few specimen oaks remain in the area adjacent to the south-eastern drive, which is now disused, and there are a few more to the east of the river Clwyd. An area of former park to the west of the house has been made into a golf course.

Three main drives serve the estate of Llannerch but only the one to the south-west is used today. This drive originally reached the A525, where the former entrance is marked by gate posts and former lodges either side. Another lodge was built, probably when the railway was made, on the eastern side of the railway. This stands at a sharp bend in the road, and is of stone. The entrance is flanked by stone gateposts and walls. The south and south-eastern drives are only tracks in the grass, the south-east one visible as a deep hollow way. Middle Lodge, at the entrance to the south drive, is a nineteenth-century two-storey brick house. Bottom Lodge, at the entrance to the south-east drive, is a single-storey stone house with a datestone of 1880. The entrance here is flanked by plain stone piers. Other tracks, also unused, connect these driveways. The drives lead to a rectangular forecourt on the south side of the house, and to the stable yard.

The park is now very sparsely planted, and the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map shows that it has been seriously depleted since the late nineteenth century. Some specimen oaks remain on the eastern side of the River Clwyd, and the banks of the river are thickly covered with regenerated growth.

The gardens at Llannerch date to two very distinct phases: the early 1660s and the 1920s. Of the first phase, an Italianate large-scale terraced garden of walled compartments, formal beds and planting, statues, ponds, and water tricks, created by Mutton Davies after a Grand Tour on the Continent, almost nothing remains. The gardens are known from two almost identical large oil paintings of c. 1662, which give a bird's-eye view of them. These gardens lasted until the end of the eighteenth century or the early years of the nineteenth century, when they were landscaped into a grass slope. John Claudius Loudon noted in 1822 that the 'whole place is modernised and the fine old house too much so'. What remains, below the later Percy Cane terracing on the east side of the house, is a steeply sloping pasture field in which scarps delineate the former terraces. At the foot of the slope is the flood plain of the river Clwyd, on which a large oak tree grows in the centre of the site of the circular pond, where the statue of Neptune stood. This pond and fountain may be depicted in a portrait of Letitia Whitehall (d. 1745) in front of a dolphin fountain with three putti, which is noted as being at Llannerch.

Two late nineteenth-century photographs show a terrace bounded by a revetment wall, running the length of the east side of the house. It is laid out with formal beds planted with bedding out plants.

From 1927-29 Captain and Mrs Piers Jones called in the garden designer Percy Cane to alter and enlarge the existing gardens. This he did by creating formal gardens immediately

around the house, woodland gardens in two dingles to the north, and on the west the old walled garden was utilized inside and out as pleasure garden. He felt it was very important to be able to walk around a garden without having to retrace one's steps, and it was possible to do this at Llannerch.

The forecourt on the south side of the house is tarmacked, and bounded on the south side by a fence and low wall, which is a continuation of the ha-ha/retaining wall to the east. The entrance has a stone pillared gateway with two stone armorial lions on the gateposts.

To the east of the house he laid out a garden in the Italianate style with a raised canal running north-south the length of the house on the already existing terrace. The canal widens at one end to make a formal pool (now converted to a swimming pool). The terrace is almost entirely paved with stone, with many flights of steps between levels. At the north end of the terrace is an arcaded loggia and summerhouse. Below the terrace are sloping lawns with shrub borders and specimen trees in the grass. Trees include a wellingtonia and deodar cedar, with poplars in the background. The garden is bounded on the east side by a stone retaining wall/ha-ha.

The two wooded dingles, Park Dingle and Smithy Dingle, which form the boundary to the north, behind the house and farm buildings, are reached by a steep flight of stone steps at the north-east corner of the garden by the house. The dingles are part of the same small valley, and were laid out as a semi-natural woodland walk. The existing woodland was thinned to let in some light and to enable other species of trees and shrubs to grow successfully.

To the west of the house and stables Percy Cane laid out a further area of pleasure garden, centred around the walled garden. Along the outside of the south wall of the walled garden was a long herbaceous border, of which only the Irish yews, which were planted equidistant along the back of the border, survive. On the north side of the walled garden is an area of lawn in which is a sunken swimming pool, the last part of the garden to be made. Two terrace walls with steps lead down to the pool which has broad expanses of sloping grass all around. These were purposely sloped and called the sun bathing slopes. To one side of the pool is a timber pavilion, which was originally thatched, and contained a bar and changing rooms. This part of the garden has a dry-stone retaining wall. Proceeding north from here one is able to reach the dingle again.

The walled garden lies to the west of the house and forms part of the pleasure garden, even though it retained its utilitarian function. The brick walls are probably eighteenth-century but the ridged stone copings could be older and may have been re-used. The outside of the wall has flat buttresses. Halfway along the herbaceous border on the south side Percy Cane inserted a gateway with pillars topped with stone balls. The opening has a double pair of narrow wrought iron gates. There is another gateway, but wider, on the corresponding north wall. On an axis with these gate is a brick pillared rose wall. The pillars stand on a low brick walling with stone slab coping. Wooden beams join the pillars together. There is a central stone paved path, and rectangular flower beds evenly spaced throughout the length of the pergola. At the centre point of the walk is a circular dipping well, now with a well cover. Steps either side lead east and west. The area to the east of the pergola is now fenced off and belongs to a recently built house at the eastern perimeter of the walled

garden. This part of the garden also contains the remains of a vinery. There is a brick archway with a wooden door in the south-western corner. In the centre of the western wall is a house, recently enlarged and modernized, called The Granary, with a datestone of 1871.

Some of the original planting of shrub roses remains, and other plants include potentillas, cotoneasters and conifers. There are some rambling roses on the pillars.

## **Sources**

### **Primary**

Two oil paintings, with only minor differences, of bird's-eye view of Llannerch, c. 1662, artist unknown. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, and private collection. Painting of Letitia Whitehall in front of a Dolphin fountain said to be at Llannerch.

### **Secondary**

Two nineteenth-century postcards of Llannerch showing house and terrace.

Evans, Revd J., The Beauties of England and Wales (1812).

Loudon, J.C., Encyclopaedia of Gardening (1822), p. 1248.

Cane, P., 'Llannerch Park', Garden Design (1938), pp. 108-115.

Pratt, D., and A.G. Veysey, A Handlist of the Topographical Prints of Clwyd (1977), no. 182.

Hubbard, E., Clwyd (1986), p.290.

Whittle, E., The Historic Gardens of Wales (1992), pp. 27-28.