

GLYN CELYN

Ref No	PGW(Po) 50 POW
OS Map	160
Grid Ref	SO 086327
Former County	Powys
Unitary Authority	Powys
District	Brecknock
Community Council	Felin-fach
Designations	None known
Site Evaluation	Grade II
Primary reasons for grading	Good example of an intact medium sized early Victorian former parsonage with wooded pleasure grounds and some ornamental planting in surrounding fields.
Type of Site	Former Parsonage, lawns and pleasure grounds; Walled kitchen garden; Stream side walks and water garden.
Main Phases of Construction	c. 1830

SITE DESCRIPTION

Glyn Celyn is situated on a level terrace part way up a gentle hillside which slopes to the north. The house is set at the top of the garden and reached by a drive which curves down and up, through wooded grounds from the south. A formal lawn, beyond a gravelled over turning circle, lies to the south side of the house, a second large lawn sweeps down to the pond from the east.

Glyn Celyn is a rectangular early Victorian parsonage in sandstone ashlar with sash windows, a hipped slate roof and end stacks. It has three storeys and three bays on its south entrance front. A large, square porch, ornamented on top by a pair of lead swans, stands over a moulded timber door with a glass fanlight which is reached by dressed stone steps from the gravel below. On the west side of the house the present owners have partly remodelled the service area, putting in new windows and installing a recessed glass conservatory/porch. A central shallow extension, a servant's passage, was recorded on the north and south-west of the house in 1889 but no sign of this remains.

The house, outbuildings and garden are all believed to date from about 1830 when they were built for the Revd Charles Griffith (died 1886), the prebendary of St. David's Cathedral, Brecon who married well. It appears that the present house was either a remodelling of, or built on the site of an earlier stone farm house or small manor. The house is almost certainly the work of the architect Robert Lugar, who designed several houses in the area. In his History of Brecknockshire Theophilus Jones described the house as the seat of 'an opulent country gentleman' and 'the only mansion in the parish'.

The Griffithses were part of the Lloyd-Griffith family who owned land and old copper workings in the area. The house remained within the family although it was leased for a short period in the mid nineteenth century to the Mitchell family. In about 1900 it was sold at auction to the Boer-Roberts family. By the 1960s the site had been sold again, to the Mathews, who sold the lodge, together with a small plot, to the Sun Valley chicken company who erected two sheds to the west of the lodge. The site passed through other ownerships until the present owners bought the house about six years ago, the previous owner having retired to the kitchen garden. The present owners of the house have since bought back the lodge.

The service/stable court, contemporary with the house, stands directly to the west of the house on a north-west alignment. There is about 4m between the two. A high rubble stone wall, standing to about 2.5m, creates the eastern boundary of this area. Mid-way along the east wall there is a wide gateway entering the court. A solid timber gate stands between a pair of 2m high integrated dressed stone piers. The external east wall of the court is planted up with climbers and shrubs. Inside the court there is an L-shaped range on the south-west and north, the stables and carriage house respectively. The two-storey buildings are made of faced rubble but the original stone tile roof was been replaced with modern tiles during the 1960s. The windows on the east face of the stables have been boarded up. The stables have a recessed central arch, with high interior wooden doors leading off on the north, south and west and a dovecote in the pediment above the arch. A date stone of 1835 is set below this in the wall. Two carriage houses are contained within the carriage house on the north, and both have retained their high paired timber doors. A central second-storey window between the doorways has been bricked up. Between the ranges and the east stable court/garden wall there is a small triangular yard of part earth, grass and cobble. A small two-storey extension attaches to the stables on the south. This appears to have been staff accommodation, the windows retain their leaded panes. A small lean-to wood store and single-storey extension, dating from about 1970, stand on the north wall of the carriage house.

From the 1960s the Mathews family began to convert the stable area first as a studio and later as a house. The ground floors of both the stables and the carriage house are presently used for storage, together with the south extension, but the second-storeys have been converted into a flat which looks out over the walled kitchen garden. Entrance to the flat is through the west interior door of the stable. The western side of the house drive used to connect into the stable yard but since the division of ownership an old service drive, dating from the 1960s, which runs around the west side of the walled kitchen garden, has provided private access for the stables.

The only known reference to parkland outside the garden at Glyn Celyn is found on a tithe

map of 1845 which included two meadows and one piece of pasture immediately to the north, north-west and south of the site within the small estate, all on land which gradually rises to the north. The earlier history of the surrounding land is unclear but it would appear that the Griffith family purchased a small block of land in addition to the land on which they built their house which included the older farm of Cae'r-perthi to the south-west of the house. On the 1889 Ordnance Survey two footpaths marked the boundary of this land. One went north to Talachddu, the other east to enter the southern garden/pleasure grounds. These paths are now tracks and the northern one still links the farm with Talachddu. A belt of conifers was planted on the eastern side of this track, possibly to mask the then path from the house. Relics of this planting, mainly Scots pine, still stand. The shapes of the meadow and pasture recorded on the 1845 tithe are still retained in the modern fields. This land is now outside of the ownership of the house and garden. It is unclear when the land was sold but the first significant sale came during the 1920s. This land still makes an important contribution to the setting of the house.

The grounds lie to the south, south-east and east of the house. Entrance to the site is to the north of a lodge, set back in a small wooded plot, on the west side of the old Pen-isa'r-waen - Felinfach road; the old A 470. A stone boundary wall runs along the eastern side of the site. To the north of the lodge there is an area of hard standing, used as a car park, to the west of which there is a new ornamental kitchen garden and a tennis court. A shelter belt of mixed woodland separates this area from the farm land beyond. From the lodge the drive heads north, past the east side of the area of hard standing, to dip down towards a curved stone bridge which crosses a small stream entering the site from the west. To the east of the drive, at this point, there is a small area of tree planted lawn which gently slopes to the east to another small stream before rising steeply up a tree planted bank to the east boundary wall. Sparse woodland lies to the west of the drive while a few mature limes grow alongside it. From the stone bridge the drive quickly climbs to the north. It splits into three, a rough western branch leading towards the kitchen garden, and a pair of metalled drives, which meet to create a circle on the south of the house, to the east. The eastern part of this drive curves around the east side of a circular lawn, in the centre of the drives, on a terrace cut into a steep eastern slope. The lawn lies about 2m above the level of the drive and the connecting slope is planted with beech, laurel and yew.

To the east of the drive the slope drops into a steep hanging wood which stands above a narrow valley. The stream from the bridge flows down this valley, along the eastern side of which there is a continuation of the south wooded bank. Along the course of the stream there is a silted up pool and a new stone cascade/bridge. The drive continues around the east of the circular lawn to enter a gravelled area on the south front of the house. Near the north-west edge of the circle there is the stump of a substantial tree. Opposite this, on the east side of the drive, there is a small group of mature oak and beech. A narrow border runs along the south front of the house. A pair of painted iron garden seats are sited one each side of the porch.

On the north-west of the house a new enclosed herb garden has been created. This garden is set between intersecting walls, belonging to the service buildings, on the west and north and trellis and yew on the east. The garden is laid out in a geometric design with box edged beds and gravel paths. On the east this garden opens on to a wide area of lawn which sweeps down to the east. A grass terrace extends for about 10m into the west side of this lawn. This

part of the garden covers about 2 acres.

A formal, raised paved stone terrace, connected to the lawn below by steps, runs along the entire east front of the house. Set on the western edge of the lawn to the north of the terrace there is a small ornamental garden building, a folly, in the Gothick style. To the east of this building the lawn has been planted up with trees and shrubs. This area of planting leads into a second new area of formal garden to the north. A large square beech hedged enclosure has been laid out containing a circular rose/summer garden intersected by cruciform malus walks. Closely mown grass defines the paths. A path leads out of the enclosure to the north where the ground drops to a small stream which crosses the northern part of the garden on a south-east alignment. A simple timber bridge crosses the stream leading into an informal wooded garden area that is separated from the farm land beyond by a raised field boundary. The course of the stream appears to have been augmented. Some stone work and mature water/damp plants grow along it. The informal woodland continues down to the south-east to a large new tear-shaped pool. A wide mown grass path runs along the northern side of the pool, separating it from an area of built up land which is probably the spoil from the lake. This land has also been recently planted up with willow, rowan and other native trees. Part way along this walk, on the north side, there is a new grotto. The walk concludes at the eastern end of the lake to the rear of a blue painted wrought iron trellis eyecatcher. Shrub woodland on the south of the lake slopes up to the east boundary wall.

The main eastern lawn descends in a point to the west side of the lake. The point is defined by the two streams, from the north-west and west, which run through the garden. The ground around this area is marshy and the southern part has been planted up with dogwood, willow and rowan. A split trunk bridge carries an informal path over to the south side of the west stream. This path continues back up the steep sided west valley to finally cross the stream again to the south of the stone bridge to which it is linked by a set of steep timber steps.

To the west of the walled kitchen garden a strip of grass, between the west wall and the kitchen garden drive, has been laid out as a water garden in a series of at least three pools which are linked by a narrow serpentine channel. The ponds are fed by a small stream which flows into the area from the fields in the west, but this has presently dried up. Ornamental planting including bamboo, roses, daphnes, witch hazel and azaleas grow around this. Ornamental trees, some raised from seed brought from China, grow along each side of the drive.

The garden is believed to be contemporary with the house. The general arrangement of wooded pleasure grounds in the south, bisected by the drive, the circular south lawn and the old pool are all recorded on a tithe map of 1845 and on the Ordnance Survey of 1889. However, both of these maps record the garden ending a short distance from the east front of the house, along the line of a rough terrace which still exists in the lawn. Beyond this there was pasture; there was no eastern pond. This extension of the garden boundary to the north and east to take in the northern stream occurred after 1903, as it is not recorded on the second edition Ordnance Survey map. It is possible that it was a development contemporary with the sale of the house in the 1920s and the improvement of the stream channel. The existence of a formal boundary; a wall, a ha-ha, along this line is also unknown. The 1889 Ordnance Survey map also records what appear to be trees, planted at equal distance around the

periphery of the south lawn. These trees may have been yew or beech, as surviving trees could date from that time.

The basis of the garden is Victorian but certain features suggest that work was on-going. Trees on the south lawn, including a redwood, appear to date from about 1880 but the two large azalea bushes nearby appear to be later, dating from about 1900-1920, from the time of the Boer-Roberts. The azaleas could be contemporary with the improvements and planting in the northern stream. The south lawn is believed to have been a croquet lawn at some period and an area to the north-east of the house a tennis lawn. The water garden to the south-west of the walled kitchen garden, and along the kitchen garden drive, was established by the Mathews family from the 1960s. Most of the planting in that area; the bamboos, roses and ornamental maples dates from this time. To the south of the kitchen garden, and east of the drive, one mature oak survives which may be as much as 200 years old. The most significant change to the grounds since about 1903, apart from the extension of the garden, is the gradual depletion of the woodland. This depletion probably reached a peak during, or soon after, the Second World War. Little other work seems to have been undertaken in the gardens since that time prior to the arrival of the present owners in about 1990 who took down a large beech on the north-east of the south lawn and cleared a large amount of rhododendron from the woodland.

The walled kitchen garden lies close to the house on the west on a gentle southern slope. The square garden covers about 1 acre and faces south-west. The garden is surrounded by stone capped rubble walls, most of which are intact, standing to about 3m high. Some sections on the west are ivied and have partly collapsed. The south wall is much lower, standing to about 1m. At the centre of this wall there is a ornamental nineteenth-century iron foot gate, set between a pair of stone piers, which leads out on to the tree planted grass to the east of the water garden. In the south-west brick footings lie on the north side of this wall, marking the position of a bothy or store shed. The eastern wall of the garden incorporates the west wall of the stable which falls to an additional storey on the garden side. The stable has been converted into a one and a half-storey flat. Modern windows face west, looking out on to the garden interior, and a wooden deck runs along upper storey, sliding windows leading on to it from the flat. Timber steps at the southern end of the deck lead down on to the garden level. The interior of the garden is grass, planted up with ornamental trees. Following work which has taken place since the 1960s the western corner of the garden, and a strip below the north wall, now stands above the rest of the area. A few old standard fruit trees suggest that this was the original level of the garden. A deep gully was excavated on the east side of the garden, below the stables, to make a pond. This idea has been abandoned but the resulting spoil lies in a heap at the gully's northern end. A small vegetable patch is maintained beneath the south face of the north wall. To the south of this two lengths of mature overgrown box hedging stands to about 1m high, crowding the line of a old path. Another short length of box runs south from a open doorway near the north-east corner of the garden. To the east of this doorway there is a second bricked up doorway on the west face of the east wall. This connected to a small corrugated iron bothy which still stands on the east face of the same wall. Glasshouses ran along the west face of the wall to the stables but no trace of these survives apart from a pair of broken wooden doors.

To the north of the garden, on each side of the kitchen drive, there are two narrow strips of

grass planted up with trees and shrubs. A rhubarb patch has been developed on the northern strip, the crowns protected and forced by old terracotta forcers. Opposite this, on the south of the drive, there is a collection of old sea-kale forcers.

To the north-east of the kitchen garden a small area of rough lawn, which runs to the west garden boundary, has also been planted up with trees and shrubs. It is separated from the main garden by a simple stock fence.

The stone walls of the kitchen garden, and the lack of a brick skin, suggest that this area of the site may predate the house of 1832. It was certainly in place by 1845 when it was clearly recorded on a tithe map. On the 1889 Ordnance Survey map the kitchen garden was recorded with an internal cruciform path layout, probably edged in the box hedging which survives. No glasshouses were recorded in the garden at this time but three had been erected along the west face of the east wall by 1904 which are recorded in a photograph of about 1960. One of these glasshouses was a vine house, another a peach. No further details regarding the contents or appearance of the kitchen garden, or the number of gardeners employed there, or elsewhere in the garden, is known.

Sources

- Primary** 1845 tithe map. The National Library of Wales.
Sale particulars, 1920s. Merriman, White & Co. London.
Photographs c. 1960 of the greenhouses in the kitchen garden. Private collection.
- Secondary** Jones, T., The History of Brecknockshire (Glanusk edn, 1909) p. 14
'Glyn Celyn' House and Garden (1992).