

TALYGARN

Ref number PGW (Gm) 8 (RCT)

OS Map 170

Grid ref ST 032 801

Former county Mid Glamorgan

Unitary authority Rhondda, Cynon, Taff

Community council Pont-y-clun

Designations Listed buildings: Talygarn (grade II*); garden wall, gates and gate piers bounding garden on south of house at Talygarn (grade II); bridge at Adam's pond in woods to south of Talygarn (grade II).
Conservation Area (Talygarn)

Site evaluation Grade II*

Primary reasons for grading Extensive remains of the late Victorian gardens and woodland grounds of the well known industrialist and antiquary George Thomas Clark. The woodland immediately around the formal garden contains some very fine specimen trees, some of them of considerable rarity, planted by Clark.

Type of site Formal terraced gardens; informal woodland garden; woodland park with informal lake and ornamental pond

Main phases of construction 1865-1898

Site description

Talygarn is a substantial stone mansion situated on elevated ground to the south of Pontyclun village. The present mainly Victorian house is largely the work of George Thomas Clark (1809-1898), a prominent and wealthy railway engineer, industrialist, and antiquary of mediaeval Glamorgan. Clark extended and partly rebuilt an earlier house on the site in Tudor Gothic style after he bought it from the daughter of Dr W. Lisle, of St Fagans, in 1865. Dr Lisle had bought Talygarn in 1841. Some further additions were made in the early twentieth century by Godfrey Clark.

Talygarn is built in Tudor Gothic style, built of local stone and slate, with mullioned and transomed windows and sandstone door and window dressings. The house is elongated east-west, with the main entrance, a single-storey three-sided porch, on the north side. The house is of varying height, the main central block being of two storeys with an attic storey. On the north side a projecting ground floor was built in 1892-93, and a single storey billiard room was added to the west of the great hall, which projects forward at the end of the main block, in 1894. The tallest part of the building is the four-storey Italianate water tower, with a crenellated parapet and blank arcading around the top, at the east end. On its east side is a date panel of 1881, and on its south

side one of 1880. Towards the west end of the south side is the raised stone flooring of a former conservatory, to the west of which is a low cross-wing extending southwards with the date '1927' on one of its rainwater heads, steps up to it at the south end, and a small lantern on top. This wing has been substantially altered for institutional use. The interior of the house is richly decorated with Italianate wood panelling, painted panels, and other Italianate and Gothic features.

In 1943, on 18th December, Talygarn became a rehabilitation centre for injured miners, and it remains a rehabilitation centre today. There are various twentieth-century hospital buildings in the grounds, mainly to the west of the house and within the walled kitchen garden.

The grounds of Talygarn include a small woodland park that lies to the south of the house on ground sloping down from the garden to an elongated informal lake. Within the woodland is an ornamental pond. A small area flanking the entrance drive at the north end of the grounds could also be considered as park rather than garden.

The entrance lies on the east side of the A4222 Llantrisant to Cowbridge road, just south of the M4. Square dressed sandstone piers set back from the road are flanked by curving walls of squared local stone with sandstone coping sloping down from the piers to lower local stone piers at their ends. The tops of the piers, with projecting cornices, were recently knocked off and now lie on the ground next to the drive. The entrance is closed by simple iron gates with curving ornamental tops. On the south side of the entrance is a two-storey lodge with a stone ground floor, red tiled first floor, slate roof and mullioned windows.

The tarmacked drive runs south-eastwards, flanked by deciduous trees underplanted with laurels. To the south, between the trees and the garden, is a bowling green and cricket ground with a wooden Boulton and Paul cricket pavilion of 1902 on its west side. The drive curves southwards, where a branch leads to Talygarn Farm to the east, and ends at the forecourt on the north side of the house.

A further subsidiary drive runs from 'The Cot' at the south end of the grounds north-eastwards through woodland, skirts the east side of the garden to the south of the house, and joins the main drive east of the house. To its north are the gardens and woodland grounds, to its south the small woodland park. This area consists largely of deciduous woodland, with sycamore, beech and oak predominating, and with some cypresses. It is underplanted with rhododendrons and laurels. Earthen paths with flights of stone steps on the steeper slopes, run from the garden through the woodland to the southern entrance and to the lake. Most of these paths are now neglected and overgrown. A central path still in use leads to Adam's pond just below a cross track running south-west/north-east to a former orchard area to the south of the garden. The pond is small and informal, with a straight stone-lined earthen dam on its south side. At its north end is an ornamental bridge taking the track over a rectangular stone-lined pool half under the arch of the bridge. The water is led from the small pool into the pond by a narrow rill. A flight of stone steps lead down from the west end of the bridge to a stone platform at its foot, in which the pool is set. The bridge has square piers at each end of its south side, but only a short stretch of parapet survives at the west end. On either side of the central arch stone panels inscribed with poems are set upright against the bridge (for the texts see the Site Dossier). These are romantic poems addressed to the 'fount'. In the wall to the east is set a plaque inscribed with names and the date 1897. Water from the pond feeds into a culvert to the south, which leads into a narrow channel running into the lake.

The lake is an artificial, naturalistic, ornamental feature with a small island in its southern half. It is elongated south-west/north-east, and is dammed at its northern end, where there is an overflow weir. The dam is stone-lined on the inside. Reeds flank the remainder of the banks. Half way along its length the lake is spanned by a narrow three-arched stone bridge with an earthen path leading to it. In style the bridge is classical, with stone parapets of balustrading and square panelled piers. Much of the balustrading has been replaced by breeze blocks and concrete coping, but stone coping and balustrading remains at the southern end. At either end the parapets slope down and are splayed, the tops ending in scrolls. The west side of the north end has been replaced by breeze blocks. Further deciduous woodland flanks the south side of the lake.

The park was largely created by G.T. Clark after 1877, when the Ordnance Survey map shows a rather different layout to that of the present day. At that time the main drive ran further south, along the boundary of the present garden to the north of the house. This drive remains as a track. It was flanked by trees, and the area to the north remained fields at that time. The subsidiary south drive was in existence, with woodland to its south, but the lake and Adam's pond did not exist then. Adam's pond is dated by a wall plaque to 1897, and this may also be the approximate date of the lake and other improvements to the park, before G.T. Clark's death in 1898. A letter dated 17 July 1926 to 'Gentlemen' from the Joint Secretaries of The Board of Management for the Convalescent Home for the South Wales Mining Industry, indicates that Mr Pettigrew, grounds superintendent at St Fagan's Castle, was called in to advise on the cleaning of the lake. The letter mentions not only the 'main masonry bridge' but also the 'Hunting bridge' and the 'plank foot-bridge'. A weir was proposed instead of the plank foot-bridge, and it was thought that if the lake was not cleaned very soon 'sections A and B' (not specified) would disappear. Photographs of the lake and grounds dating to c. 1920 show the lakesides mostly bare, with a few young trees and shrubs, and young conifers on the south side. The bridge is shown with its balustrading complete.

The gardens lie to the north, west, and south of the house. To the south of the house the ground slopes down towards the woodland park. There are three main areas, each with a distinct character. To the north of the house is a large sunken formal garden surrounded by trees and by an informal shrubbery to the east. To the south of the house is a formal terraced garden, and to the west an informal arboretum area of grass planted with specimen mixed trees.

To the north of the house the drive enters the gardens from the north at the east end of the house. It passes a cottage and hospital buildings on the east, and a stone and brick wall bounding a yard to the north-east of the house that now has modern institutional buildings in it. The drive turns west, where it is flanked by a stone wall and yew hedge on the north and a yew hedge topped by clipped cones on the south. To the west, in front of the house, is a large level forecourt of tarmac and lawn, bounded on the north side by stone balustrading with flat coping and wide piers at regular intervals. In the centre is a semi-circular projection with a stone bench around it. At the east end of the lawn next to the balustrading a fluted lead vase stands on a circular stone plinth. The forecourt overlooks the sunken garden to the north, which is reached by concrete steps at the east and west ends. The garden is revetted on its south side by a wall of brick-shaped stone blocks c 1.5 m high. The wall has frequent buttresses along its entire length.

The garden is laid out to lawn, divided into four quarters by wide tarmac cross paths, and with perimeter paths around it. In each corner is a square ornamental lead tub on a stone plinth decorated with diamond embossed patterns, friezes around the top, and

heraldic panels including the motto 'Try and Trust' and the date '1893'. On the north, east and west sides the paths end in semi-circular alcoves similar to that on the forecourt wall, with stone benches and backs and with stone paving in a semi-circular pattern. In the centre is an octagonal pool with a stone edge, brick sides and brick steps on the north side. It has a modern roof and a statue of a heron, both dated 1983 and donated as part of a 'Garden for the Disabled' project. Around the pool are four smaller lead tubs decorated with heraldic panels and dated '1894'. In the centres of the four grass quarters are raised octagonal beds surrounded by low stone walls similar to the buttressed wall. They are reached by diagonal tarmac paths running from the centre. In the north-east corner is a flight of brick steps with iron treads leading up to a tarmac path to a former drive to the north and walks through the woodland area.

The sunken garden is surrounded on all but the south side by belts of mixed ornamental trees, some of considerable size. These include a large poplar on the west side and two large yellow conifers. Along the east side of the garden is an area of large shrubs, mainly rhododendrons, through which narrow stone-edged paths wind. A path leads off the north-east end of the forecourt into this area. Between the paths are raised areas, including a mound *c.* 2 m high, some parts of which are ornamented with lumps of water-worn limestone and ferns. Steps of brick and stone with iron treads lead up to the raised areas.

To the south of the house is a terraced garden bounded by a rubble stone revetment wall and drive running from the east end of the house to the west end. Immediately in front of the house is a large level lawn with a mature cedar tree and a large cork oak near its west end. From the terrace is a fine view out southwards across the park. A tarmac path runs east-west across the middle of the lawn, another runs beside the house, and near the southern side are two large evergreen oaks. On its east side the lawn is bounded by a yew hedge and a stone and brick wall with an ornamental stone archway set into it at its northern end. This is of dressed stone, has a Tudor arch flanked by capitals, a broken pediment, and a wrought iron pair of gates. The gates are thought to come from Venice and to have been hung in 1892-93. On the south side the terrace has a parapet wall rebuilt with breeze blocks, but with square stone corner piers with overhanging cornices. At the east end is a projection which marks the site of a former tower, now gone.

Towards the west end of the house is the raised floor of the former conservatory. Flights of stone steps lead up to it at each end, and it has a low brick revetment wall with stone coping. The floor is of diagonally set marble and slate square tiles. At intervals along the edge are four fluted iron vases on circular stone bases. These are the same as that on the forecourt and they appear in the same places in a photograph of the conservatory of *c.* 1920. This shows it to have been a single-storey glazed building with a central canted section, pitched glazed roof and two-storey section at the east end. It also shows box-edged beds and a gravel path in front. A modern building lies along the north side, but at the east end French doors lead out from the house into the former conservatory, and a *Magnolia grandiflora* grows against the wall. In the lawn in front is an octagonal stone-edged bed.

The west end of the garden south of the house is occupied by hospital buildings, lawn and cypress trees.

Towards the east end of the lawn a steep flight of stone steps leads down to a lower terrace. The revetment wall of the terrace is built of coursed, roughly squared stone. The steps are flanked by pierced parapet walls terminated by piers. The western pier is topped by a fluted stone urn decorated with laughing faces on either side. The

eastern pier has only the base of the urn on it: the urn itself lies on the ground beside it and has a topknot of fruit which is missing on the other urn.

The second terrace is laid out with a flagstone path from end to end flanked by narrow grass strips and flowerbeds up to the revetment walls. The lower revetment wall, which is similar to the upper, is topped by a low arching balustrade of yellowish sandstone punctuated by square piers. A flight of stone steps on the same axis as the upper flight leads down to the lowest, third terrace, which is bounded on the south side by a rubble stone revetment wall with a partly battered base. The terrace is a quadrilateral area of lawn laid out formally with island rose beds arranged around a central sundial. The ornate stone sundial is set on a stepped octagonal base, and has a squat, splayed column topped by a classical capital top. On the southern edge of the terrace is a stone back for a former seat on top of the revetment wall.

The terraces are bounded on the west side by a narrow tarmac path flanked by yew hedges. The path runs from the steps at the east end of the former conservatory at the north end to four flights of stone steps leading to a wrought iron gate flanked by stone piers at the south end of the garden. The gate is very similar to that at the east entrance to the garden. At the north and south ends of the walk are yew arches, the south arch being flanked by clipped yew balls above the general level of the hedges. Further balls flank side entrances cut in the hedges into the second and third terraces.

Below the drive the axis of the walk is continued by a path and flights of stone steps down the slope to the secondary drive. The path is flanked by lower yew hedges, their top clipped into rounded balls at intervals. Next to the lower drive is a topiary yew peacock. To the east is a small garden compartment surrounded by a yew hedge. The path continues, with stone steps at the top, into the woodland park to the south of the drive.

To the west and south-west of the house is the third main area of the gardens, the woodland grounds. This is a large, gently sloping informal area laid out as an ornamental arboretum, with specimen trees in grass. Laurels screen the track that runs along the north edge of the area. The mature trees are both deciduous and coniferous, and include plane, sweet chestnut, ash, sycamore, beech, lime, evergreen oak, and specimen conifers such as Californian redwoods, Wellingtonias, Japanese cedars, Douglas firs, various pines, cypresses and some very fine Lebanon cedars. Unusual large, fine specimens include *Juniperus recurva* (Mexican drooping juniper), *Picea jezoensis* var. *Hondoensis* (Honda spruce), and *Torreya californica* (Californian nutmeg). There are also large specimens of *Fagus asplenifolia* (fernleaf beech) and *Tilia petiolaris* (weeping silver lime). Along the west boundary of the grounds is a belt of thicker tree planting, underplanted with laurels.

The gardens appear to have been made in at least two main phases in the second half of the nineteenth century. Little is known of the garden that may have existed before G.T. Clark bought the property in 1865. Between 1841 and 1865 the property belonged to Dr Lisle and then his daughter, and planting may have taken place during this period as Dr Lisle is known to have planted at the Rectory in St Fagans. In 1877 (1st edition Ordnance Survey map) there was no garden to the north of the house, an informal garden with a tower to the south, and an arboretum area to the west. In 1888 a small field to the north of the house was excavated to make a sunken lawn and central fountain, which originally had a Venetian cover. The lawn was later enlarged to the present size of the sunken terrace and the perimeter seats were built. The shrubbery, rockery and woodland were also added to the north of the house. In 1893 the south garden was altered by the creation of the terraces (a terrace for tea-taking and a rose

garden). The dates of 1893 and 1894 on the lead planters in the sunken garden, and the 1892-93 date of erection of the Venetian gates in the south garden probably provide a terminus ante quem for the making of these gardens. 1892-94 was a period of alteration to the house (the northwards extension and the billiard room), which would suggest that the garden was also being altered at this time. The earliest part of Clark's garden to survive unaltered, therefore, is the arboretum area to the west and south-west of the house. Clark was something of a horticulturalist and at Talygarn he propagated tree seeds and bulbs recently introduced from South Africa and Japan. Some of his horticultural activities are mentioned in his correspondence: in 1870 planting was 'in full spate', and in 1872 he was sent seeds of *Abies firma* (Japanese fir), introduced from Japan in 1861, by George Wilson. There is correspondence with nurserymen and exchange of seeds with Lady Huntley, Lady Guest and Sir Henry Vivian.

A series of photographs taken in about 1920 of the house and grounds give a good indication of the appearance then of some areas. The forecourt was laid out formally, with a lawn in the western half and a gravel square in the eastern, with an octagonal lead basin on a stone plinth in the centre. The top terrace on the south side was bounded by quatrefoil balustrading. The tower on this terrace is shown on some of the photographs. The ground floor was rectangular, with round-arched openings, some with wrought iron grilles, and a shallow hipped tile roof. Above rose a tall, narrow, three-storey tower, its top storey slightly corbelled out. A chimney rose up the south side, from second floor level. Another photograph shows vases on top of the gate piers at the south end of the terraces.

Since becoming a Rehabilitation Centre the structure and much of the layout and major planting in the gardens have undergone only superficial alteration. Alterations on the south side include the removal of the conservatory, except for its floor, the demolition of the tower, the replacement of some of the terrace balustrading and loss of ornaments. On the north side the forecourt has been altered and the lead basin has gone and there have been modern additions to the pool in the sunken garden.

The kitchen garden lies on ground sloping to the south-east to the east of the house. It is roughly rectangular, orientated north-west/south-east, and is bounded by walls of stone ornamented with horizontal bands of yellow brick. The west wall appears older than, although of similar style to, the other walls. The walls are *c.* 2.7 m high except the north-east wall which is *c.* 4 m high, and the lower end of which has been rebuilt. Near the top of the south-west and north-east sides are wide entrances flanked by square piers. The east entrance has an old wooden gate on runners. Just inside the west one is a small lean-to rendered brick building. Lower down the west wall is a disused doorway. Various institutional buildings occupy the upper section of the garden. This is terminated on the south side by a revetment wall *c.* 1.2 m high, topped by large stone slabs, below which the garden is laid out to grass, with some old fruit trees. In the middle of this lower end is an old iron water tank.

The internal layout shown on the 1877 Ordnance Survey map of a criss-cross of paths in the northern half has gone. A photograph of about 1920 shows a pair of ornate wrought-iron gates in the north-west wall, with a curving path outside them leading to the forecourt.

Sources

Primary

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Convalescent Home for the South Wales Mining Industry: National Museum of Wales
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