

CONDOVER HOUSE (formerly VILLA MARINA)

Ref No	PGW (Gd) 50 (CON)
OS Map	116
Grid Ref	SH 806 823
Former County Council	Gwynedd
Unitary authority	Conwy
Community Council	Llandudno
Designations	Listed buildings: Condover House Grade II*; Gazebo and sea wall at Condover House Grade II
Site Evaluation	II*
Primary reasons for grading	A very well preserved, unusual 1930s garden in the modern style which complements the contemporary house. The use of contrasting materials and the high quality of the design by Harry Weedon has produced a very sophisticated garden which, like the house, has echoes of ocean liners and includes a fine pavilion on the sea shore.
Type of Site	Modern style formal and terraced gardens; pavilion
Main Phases of Construction	c. 1936

SITE DESCRIPTION

Condover House, formerly known as Villa Marina, is a striking modern building situated right on the sea front in a row of villas at the far east end of Llandudno, just to the west of Little Ormes head. The long, gently curving shore stretches out to east and west below the house, from which there is a panoramic and uninterrupted view of shore and sea.

The house is built in the international modern style with strong overtones of the ship architecture of ocean liners. These include tall, funnel-like chimneys and tubular railings around curving balconies. The house is two-storey, built of reinforced concrete coated with a smooth white render. The whole building is given a strong horizontal emphasis by its flat roof, brick and dark faience banding and by the projecting cantilevered canopies at ground/first-floor level and roof level around the north side and over the porch on the south side. The main entrance, on the south side facing the forecourt on Colwyn Road, is a glazed convex porch with a similar glazed window above and a third, drum-shaped storey rising above the general roof level. This is positioned in the corner between two wings, to the west and south. The south front has curving rooms at either end, with a plainer east wing behind them.

Villa Marina was built as a private house for Harry Scribbans by the architect Harry W. Weedon in c. 1936. Weedon was well known as a cinema designer. The house was later converted to a hotel, when garages in the south wing were replaced by extra rooms. It is now a convalescent home, used mainly in the summer months.

The gardens at Condover House lie to the north and west of the house. To the north the garden is modern in style and descends in terraces to the shore, with a fine pavilion on the foreshore and wide-ranging views to the shore and sea. By contrast, to the west the character is less modern, formal and more enclosed, with a sunken lawn and pool surrounded by stone walls. Planting is predominantly of salt-tolerant evergreen shrubs such as hebes and griselinias and there are no trees. A feature of the gardens is planting holes and strips in the tops of drum piers and walls.

The entrance is on the south side of the house, on Colwyn Road. The property is bounded by walls of roughly coursed stone blocks of uneven size, with flat tops. The central section, in front of the forecourt, has entrances at either end, the west one with a low gate. The wall is in gently curved sections punctuated by cylinders with planting holes in their tops. To the east are two higher round piers with domed tops and a wooden gate between. 'Villa Marina' is inscribed on the piers. This originally led to garages but now leads only to a small service area. There is also a higher wall to the west, bounding the garden, which is similar to the forecourt wall, with four round piers with domed tops.

The forecourt is tarmacked, divided from the garden on the west by a low wall of large stone blocks. Along its north side, in front of the lounge, is a small flowerbed edged with beach stones. The main entrance has two shallow curving steps of cream terrazzo with darker chequerboard bands around the edge. A modern concrete ramp is overlain on the middle, up to the door. The steps end in scrolls of dark, almost black brick set vertically and then horizontally, topped with cream ?? terrazzo. In the centre of each is a circular planting hole.

A balcony with a low random stone parapet wall and cream terrazzo flooring curves around the lounge in the north-west corner of the house and then runs along the north front, here fronted by tubular railings. This has two dark chequerboard bands, similar to those on the front steps, along its outer side. Two steps in the middle of the north side lead down to a slightly lower terrace of random stone paving. A central flight of rough stone steps, with tubular rails down the middle, is flanked by low walls of roughly cut blocks, with flat coping stones. The steps lead down to a lawn terrace. The upper half of the slope either side of the steps is sloping lawn, the lower half a rockwork bank. A further flight of steps leads down to the lawn at the east end of the garden. The garden is bounded on the east side by a high rubble stone wall with flat coping and a downward-curving section at its north end, below which is another faience-topped slate drum pier with a central planting hole. To the north is a section of black faience-topped low wall leading to steps between the pavilion and wall down to the shore.

The north, seaward, edge of the lower lawn is bounded by an outwardly curving low concrete wall topped with black-glazed faience flat coping, with a central planting strip containing low evergreen and deciduous shrubs and herbaceous plants. The wall

is topped by tubular 'liner' railing. The wall is the parapet of the sea wall which bounds the garden. This is a substantial, high, battered wall of concrete faced with random rubble stone. It is decorated with four closely set horizontal bands of black faience and below them two narrower strips of darker stone. The wall terminates at both ends with drum-shaped piers of stone, with tops of very narrow horizontal bands of slate set in concrete, with black faience bands around the bases and tops. In the middle of the tops are central circular planting holes containing large hebe bushes. This pattern of pier is repeated throughout the garden to the north of the house. To the east of the eastern pier is a short length of faience-topped stone parapet wall and a short pierced concrete wall between the pier and the pavilion.

At the north-east end of the lawn is a circular pavilion built on a drum-shaped rubble stone bastion extending out over the shore. Half way down the bastion is a horizontal band of glass brick glazing, with a door at the west end giving access to the room within it. The pavilion is a prominent feature of the garden and is widely visible from the shore. It is in the same style as the house, built of concrete, painted cream, with a flat roof supported on six ribbed columns. The two on the landward side stand on a circular stone plinth, outside which is a shallow step down to a wide circular strip of stone paving with a band of bluish stone around the edge. The seaward columns stand on a low stone parapet wall with black faience top. From the windows between the columns there are panoramic views of the shore and sea. The interior has three flights of shallow terrazzo steps between the landward columns, the lower steps convex, the upper concave, each one banded with a black and white chequerboard strip similar to those on the porch steps and upper terrace. The terrazzo floor has a central circular mosaic of a dolphin above blue waves, with a yellow sky and a green rim. Around this is a star-shaped band of dark stone.

Curving concrete steps lead down around the bastion below the pavilion to a gently sloping concrete path running westwards along the lower part of the lawn terrace revetment wall down to a simple iron gate on to the foreshore. The path is bounded on the shore side by a low black faience-topped stone parapet wall topped by tubular railings. The gate is flanked by two slate drums with black faience coping and central planting holes on top and black faience bands around the bottom. To the west, steep concrete steps lead southwards up the slope between stone revetment walls. The banding on the sea wall continues up the wall on the east side of the steps.

From the steps there is an opening to the west on to a small lawned terrace. This lies in the north-west corner of the garden and is bounded on the north and west by a substantial, high rubble stone wall which extends above the lawn as a low parapet wall with flat stone coping. The lawn has a concrete path along its south side, above which a sloping scarp is supported by a latticework of horizontal and sloping concrete struts. Wallflowers poke out from behind them. Above is a small, steeply sloping lawn at the head of which is a low random stone revetment wall topped with a parapet wall of horizontally banded, unmortared slates. This bounds the garden to the west of the house. The west boundary wall of the garden is low at the north end, rising to a greater height in steps up the slope.

The garden to the west of the house has a slightly more traditional character, with echoes of Lutyens. It is formal, with a central north-south axis centred on a long pool,

with an arch in a curving stone wall at the north end. To the west of the forecourt is a rectangular sunken lawn with narrow perimeter and cross random stone paths. In the centre is the narrow pool, with a central circular section and curving ends. The pool is concrete-lined, with smooth concrete paving around the edges. Irises grow in the north end of the pool and it is home to many goldfish. The lawn has raised beds, revetted with stone walls and planted with hebes and other low-growing shrubs, around it. In the middle of the east and west sides are curving recesses. In the middle of the south end is a semi-circular recess with a white pebble floor backed by a smooth concrete-paved step up to a random stone paved strip set with three coloured pebble roundels and backed by a low slate stone revetment wall. Along the south side is a shrub border against the boundary wall, planted chiefly with brachyglottis (senecio). The garden is bounded on the east by a low wall and on the west by a high one, both of rubble stone. That on the east has a central planting strip set with sempervivums, with griselinia bushes at each end. On the north the lawn is bounded by a low slate stone wall with concrete coping, with a gap in the centre for a similar pebbled semi-circular recess to that at the south end, with two paved steps up to the next compartment to the north. On either side of the gap are two griselinia bushes. A small sundial stands on the pebbles and a plaque records that it was presented by Mr E.G. Miller in 1961.

To the south is a small rectangular compartment with a flight of stone steps down to it from the terrace on the west side of the house. It is paved with random stone, with a central circular raised bed bounded by low slate walling topped with smooth concrete coping. In the centre of the bed, which was sparsely planted, is a small rectangular pool. Around the edge of the compartment are similar low walls retaining raised beds planted with low-growing shrubs.

A path of random stone paving at the north end of the compartment leads to a round-arched central opening in a high, curving wall which terminates the vista at the north end of the garden west of the house. The random rubble stone wall has flat coping, with three stone and concrete domes on top. The wall slopes down at either end and is concave when viewed from the south. It has a central opening flanked by two round windows, all decorated with bands of five slightly tapering slates fanning out from the openings. The windows have four, set vertically and horizontally, the doorway three, of slightly larger slates, around the head. The east window has narrow lead cross bars in a wooden frame set in it. Both are missing from the west window.

On the north side of the wall is a random stone paved path flanked by raised beds containing hebes. The retaining walls of the beds are similar to those in the rest of this part of the garden. At the east end of the path a gateway flanked by a square pier with a concrete-domed top leads to the steps down to the garden below.

The gardens were constructed at the same time as the house was built in c. 1936. Their style, particularly on the northern side, points to the architect of the house, Harry Weedon, as their designer. There are many design elements and details which are common to both house and garden, for instance the railings, the black faience banding and the terrazzo paving and its decoration. The pavilion in particular shares the style of the house and the view from its 'windows' is reminiscent of that from the bridge of a ship. The high-quality detailing, in the northern part of the garden in particular, gives the garden a strong horizontal emphasis and also, by the juxtaposition of

different materials, makes it one of contrasts between rough and smooth, the rural and the sophisticated, the garden and the town. The result is a very high-quality, sophisticated and delightful seaside garden.

Sources

Secondary

Design and Construction, February 1937.