

## **DOLMELYNLLYN**

<b>Ref No</b>	PGW (Gd) 33 (GWY)
<b>OS Map</b>	124
<b>Grid Ref</b>	SH 725 240
<b>Former County</b>	Gwynedd
<b>Unitary Authority</b>	Gwynedd
<b>Community Council</b>	Ganllwyd
<b>Designations</b>	Snowdonia National Park; Listed buildings: House Grade II, game larger Grade II.
<b>Site Evaluation</b>	<b>Grade II</b>

**Primary reasons for grading** Well preserved and documented formal gardens, terraced kitchen garden, wall with bee boles; unspoilt park with interesting features including a picturesque walk to the Rhaedr Du. The estate belonged briefly to William Madocks who helped to popularise the walk.

**Type of Site** Park with lake, woodland, formal terraced gardens, disused walled kitchen gardens.

**Main Phases of Construction** Nineteenth century

### **SITE DESCRIPTION**

Dolmelynlyn is built on the western side of the Afon Mawddach valley, on a natural shelf, on the extreme western edge of the park, looking out over its gardens and the park. The house is built of grey stone, dressed with an uneven finish, smoothly dressed stone being used only around the windows and doors. It is part two-, part three-storey, with an oriel window over the door, a rectangular castellated tower, another oriel window and a large bay on the south side, and tall stone chimney-stacks. The window frames are painted black and white, as are some small areas of mock-Tudor timbering. It is rather rambling, with a hotch-potch of architectural styles, due to many additions having been made over the years.

The oldest surviving part of the house, at the back, is sixteenth century, and is more or less intact, with successive additions at the front. The large room now used as the dining room was added by Robert Vaughan at the time of his marriage, in 1645, and later (at the end of the eighteenth century) W. A. Madocks transformed the building into a 'cottage orne'. The rest is mostly Victorian, built by Charles Williams, but not added all at once. A series of photographs

dated between 1860 and 1890 show alterations almost every year. The elaborate oriel window over the main entrance, for instance, was added in 1875. Some of the most fanciful additions - castellations and an arcaded wall resembling that of a cloister in the courtyard - seem to be the latest. The house is now used as a hotel.

A rambling collection of linked outbuildings attached to the back of the house is probably of different dates. Now used as offices, stores and so on, the buildings include a former dairy and no doubt other domestic offices; a castellated tower near the south-west corner of the house was once an outside lavatory but now houses the controls of the water supply.

Nearby is a two-storey stone barn, with steps to the upper floor on the north-west end. It has a steeply-pitched slate roof with a central chimney and a dormer window on the north-east side, having been converted into living accommodation. It is shown on an estate map of 1860. A large, stone-built circular dovecote standing near this barn appears in photographs taken in 1870 and 1873, but was presumably short-lived as it is not shown on the estate map of 1860 or the Ordnance Survey 25 in. map of 1889.

The game larder is in the garden, separate from the house and other outbuildings, above the formal terraces and built against the foot of the wooded slope to the west. It is rectangular, stone-built with a pitched slate roof, and has round-headed windows and doorways, except for a small doorway above ground level on the east side, which has a flat lintel over it. There are two doors side by side on the north end, one central and the other west of it. There are two small windows above these and three larger ones in the east wall. The building is not shown on the estate map of 1860, but appears on the Ordnance Survey map of 1889.

The stable block lies round three sides of a small rectangular yard, below and to the east of the house. The yard now has a tarmac surface and the buildings have mostly been converted to residential use, making it difficult to identify their original purposes. They are built of stone similar to that of the house, with slate roofs. The buildings are cut back into the slope on the west side and approached by a drive from above, coming from the north-west. The longer, east, side of the range is shown on the estate map of 1860, with a square building further east which has now gone; the present arrangement appears on the 1889 map. A map of about 1819 is not clear enough to say which building is shown, but there was one at that date, surrounded by an oblong yard. By 1889 there was also an approach from the south drive, which has now become a footpath, and from the original east drive, now disused.

In an enclosure north of the house is an aviary. This is a small, rustic-style wooden building on a stone base with a partly open front, the spaces covered with wire netting. It has a pitched roof covered with wooden shingles.

A low stone barn, with pitched slate roof and few window or door openings, stands adjacent to the south drive towards the southern end, standing on a small semi-circular terrace retained by a dry-stone wall. The conifers planted on the terrace (or, more likely, their predecessors) are shown on the 1889 25 in. map, as is the terrace itself and the barn. The building is in a part of the park which did not belong to Dolmelynllyn when the 1860 estate map was drawn up, but is

probably older than most of the other outbuildings. It is now a bat house managed by the National Trust.

The Observatory is an odd little building, named as such on the 1889 map but falling within the area not included on the 1860 map. It is a small stone and timber building, partly painted pink, with a chimney and a brick extension, and has been converted into a house. It has a small verandah along the east side, and looks out over the south-west part of the park towards the hills beyond.

The main road from Porthmadog to Dolgellau has always run along much the same line as it now does (although it has been recently straightened), and thus divides the park into east and west parts. The eastern part extends down to the Afon Mawddach and the western up to the beginning of the steeper part of the valley-side, where the house stands. The formal gardens are to the east and south of the house and the kitchen garden to the west, behind it.

The greater part of the park now lies to the south, but an estate map of 1860 shows that the park at that time was less than two-thirds of the size it now is, and the house is nearly central to the western edge of the original park. By 1889 the park had been extended on both sides of the road, and the lake constructed; as Charles Williams, the owner of Dolmelynlyn at the time, had acquired the Berth-lwyd estate in 1873, it is probable that the park was extended shortly after this into land formerly belonging to Berth-lwyd.

During the seventeenth century Dolmelynlyn was a subsidiary Vaughan property, and from 1704 it was let in trust for Robert Vaughan, who was a minor. He seems never to have lived there himself and the property continued to be let for most of the eighteenth century. It was sold by another Robert Vaughan (grandson of the former) who died in about 1795, but appears to have continued to be let. Several different tenants are recorded, but the first of interest was J. E. Madocks in 1796. By 1798 his son, W. A. Madocks, who was later to have such an impact on the Porthmadog area, was described as 'of Dolmelynlyn', and it seems likely that he bought the estate in that year, although it was his father who let it again in 1800, after Madocks had moved to Tremadog. W. A. Madocks had been left a trust fund to buy land and it seems that he bought Dolmelynlyn out of this.

Despite his short stay at Dolmelynlyn, Madocks transformed the existing sixteenth- and seventeenth-century building into a fashionable 'cottage orne', and the present dining room retains some of this style. It is also just possible that some of the oldest trees in the park date from Madocks' time, and he may have laid out or altered the park. It was certainly during his time that the walk to the waterfall, Rhaeadr Du, became popular, and some of the many paths in the woodland to the north-west of the house may have been made by him. When he died in 1828 the estate was taken into Chancery to pay his debts, but the Madocks Trust retained an interest in it until it was sold in 1860. A John Vaughan lived at Dolmelynlyn in 1859 so the original family may also have retained an interest.

The purchaser in 1860 was Charles Reynolds Williams, who acquired the property in a dilapidated state. He conveyed it to his son, Romer Williams, in 1892, and in the intervening 32

years Charles Williams completely redesigned, rebuilt and refurbished the house and grounds, as well as considerably enlarging the estate. It is clear from the series of photographs which is kept at the house, covering this period, that Charles Williams enjoyed altering and adding to his property, and scarcely a year went by without some improvement to house or garden, or both. He must also have planted the many large exotic conifers and other trees which survive in the park, as well as the lost conifer avenue of the north drive and the largely surviving avenue of limes along the southern part of the south drive.

The estate map of 1860 shows the present kitchen garden planted as an orchard, and only a small 'garden' north-west of the house, in the park. The 'pleasure grounds', which covered the area now formal gardens and woodland, including the slope above the stable block, appear to have been all woodland and shrubbery at this time.

The Ordnance Survey 25 in. map of 1889 shows a completely different picture, with the large southern extension of the park and its lake; formal gardens laid out south and east of the house; the orchard terraced and divided up; another small orchard cut out of the northern part of the park; and many paths and woodland walks, as well as a new drive from the south. The photographs date more closely some of the alterations - for instance, in 1862 there was only one terrace south of the house, but by 1867 there was a second, with a croquet lawn below, where the fountain now is. This last had been constructed by 1889 and is shown in a photograph of 1890.

In 1860 the drive approached from the east, passing the stable block on its way up to the house and then heading off at an angle to the north-west, because of the slope, with a sweeping curve to the north of the house. There was also a track on a line close to that of the present north drive, but leading only as far as the small garden. By 1889 the latter had acquired an avenue of conifers and become a drive, and the new south drive had been created, both having lodges; the south drive utilised the top curve of the old east drive, which survived but had no lodge. Now the east drive has disappeared, although it is still shown on the current edition of the Ordnance Survey 1:10,000 map.

Tracks leading into the eastern part of the park, together with some of the planting alongside them, have also disappeared, but the retaining wall above one of them can still be seen at the side of the road, near the sewage works.

Although not in the park, the waterfalls at Rhaeadr Du were on the estate and the visit to these was one of the chief attractions of a stay at the house in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The paths up through the natural sessile oak woodland which lead to the falls were therefore probably already in existence at this time. These paths and woods are now maintained by the National Trust and form an important part of the setting of the park.

The estate was sold by Charles Williams's son in 1907 to Alexander Campbell Blair. The house became a hotel in the 1930s and the estate was eventually given to the National Trust by the Campbell Blairs in 1988.

The north drive is the only one currently in use. At the entrance is a lodge. Now a farmhouse, this is stone-built and painted white, with a slate roof, and was built between 1860 and 1889. It has a large hexagonal central stone chimney-stack and the central portion is two-storeyed. The entrance is flanked by curving stone walls with balustrading and square, flat-topped gate piers. The drive runs westwards at first, before curving round to the south, and this line is similar to that of a track shown on the estate map of 1860. Even this track, however, did not exist in about 1819, when the 2-in. manuscript map for the Ordnance Survey 1-in. first edition was surveyed. An avenue of beech trees, with some oak and birch, flanks the drive. This replaces a former avenue of conifers, shown on the 1889 map.

The south drive is now only used for access to the Observatory and second barn, but was at one time the main approach to the house. The south lodge is smaller than the north, but also two-storey and painted white, with a slate roof and central chimney, in this case brick and square. There is balustraded walling at the entrance, as at the north lodge, but this shows signs of having been rebuilt, and may perhaps have been moved nearer to the lodge when the road was widened. Part has a flat coping instead of the arches at the top of the balustrading, and part has brick arches instead of stone. The gate piers are stone-built, square and rendered and there is a modern gate.

The drive crosses the part of the park which was probably added in 1873, and therefore is likely to have been developed shortly after this date. It is over three-quarters of a kilometre long, levelled into the slope where necessary, running from the south lodge through the park and along the east side of the gardens before meeting the north drive just north of the house, by a large mature copper beech tree. The junction here is shown as a sweeping curve on the 1889 Ordnance Survey map, but has now been simplified. There is also a gravelled drive down to the stables from this junction, a remainder of the original main drive. This approached across the park from the east (this part now disused) and passed the stables, climbing towards the north-west, and gained the rear of the house via the wide curve later used by the south drive. This drive was shown on the 1819 manuscript map and was presumably the one in use in Madocks' day. Another drive or track, now not visible on the ground, is shown on the 1889 map (but not that of 1860) approaching the stables from the north-east, with a road gate immediately south of the main north entrance.

South of the gate to the south of the Observatory the drive has an avenue of limes, shown on the 1889 map. At that time it was fenced to protect the trees, but only two iron posts now remain of the fence on the west side, and the eastern fence is modern post-and-wire. The drive reaches the road via the garden of the south lodge, and this access is no longer used.

If one takes the northern part of the south drive as the eastern boundary of the gardens, there is an area beyond this on the east which now falls within the park, although it formed part of the 1860 'pleasure grounds'. It consists of a slope down from the drive extending to the lake and stable block, which contains several paths, some possibly dating from before 1860, although some are clearly modern, such as the one zig-zagging down from the south drive to the southern end of the lake. The path shown on the 1889 map in the same area is straight. The path round the lake, however, and others leading back towards the stables, were probably laid

out by Charles Williams.

The park is divided up into several areas by roads and drives. These all have slightly different characters, though all share the basic similarity of grazing land with scattered planted trees. The best agricultural land is the area east of the Porthmadog to Dolgellau road, bounded by the river. Although intensively farmed, many of the deciduous parkland trees remain, planted in groups and small plantations. Tracks into this area have disappeared, as have two small buildings shown on the 1889 map.

The main area of the park west of the road, east of the south drive and south of the north drive, slopes fairly gently up to the west and is also good grazing land. It is a little rougher and more uneven to the north-west. The area contains two giant sequoias (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*), one of which is the largest in Wales, and the stump of a third. There is a group of beeches of mixed ages close to the stable block, and a tall horse chestnut nearby. There are also some recently planted conifers, and some older ones south of the open area south of the stable block. The trees which used to flank the Porthmadog-Dolgellau road have mostly gone as a result of road improvements.

The small area north of the north drive is more sloping and uneven and has rougher grass, with invading wild vegetation. Again, it has lost most of its trees, but there is one large pine and conifers near the boundary wall. The south-west area is the roughest of all and never seems to have had many trees; there are only a few at present.

The rather steep, wooded slope above the lake and stables was once part of the pleasure grounds but now falls into the park, since being cut off from the garden by the south drive. This remains more or less modified natural woodland. An open area south of the stable block used to contain buildings, shown on the 1889 map but not on the 1860 one, and now gone.

The lake is small and roughly oval in shape, with an artificial island. It has been created by damming the stream, Nant Las, which runs down through the woodland to the west and across the park to join the river. The dam, which takes the form of an earth bank, with walling on the lake side, is along the south and east sides. The lake is not shown on the 1860 estate map, which shows the stream, running unimpeded to the south-east, as more or less the boundary of the park. However, the 1889 Ordnance Survey map shows the lake and dam just as it now is. Close to the lake, on the far side of the path along its west side, is the site of the ice-house, a hollow, with a little stone walling remaining.

A boathouse is indicated on the 1889 map, about half way along the west side of the lake. The superstructure has gone, but the walling (dry-stone, using shaped blocks) which supported it remains. At the north end and along the east side of the lake are both deciduous and coniferous trees, including a good specimen of Monterey cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*). There is a wych elm in a group of oaks at the north-east corner of the lake.

In the woodland to the north-west of the house is an extensive system of footpaths, many of them open to the public (on the National Trust's land). They are all shown on the 1889 Ordnance Survey map and some on the estate map of 1860, and were presumably originally all

recreational paths and rides belonging to Dolmelynlyn. The post-1860 paths were clearly laid out by Charles Williams, but some are certainly old routes and the main path from the garden linking up with the system, giving access to the Afon Ganllwyd and the Rhaeadr Du, was probably laid out by William Madocks, who often entertained guests in search of the picturesque. The walk up to the waterfall was a favourite with visitors to Dolmelynlyn in Madocks' day and later.

The path leading out of the garden passes the kitchen garden and follows the track up to the bee boles, just beyond the garden wall. Once through the gate it runs parallel with the park wall for some distance, and is wide and levelled into the slope. Other paths lead off from it into the woods, but none is so well made. Further on the nature of the terrain means that the path becomes more uneven, but it continues to be as wide and level as possible, with stone revetting in the edges where necessary. A modern bridge crosses the river below the waterfall, probably on the site of an older one, and beyond this point the well-made path cannot be traced.

The gardens cover a small area compared with that occupied by the park, but are nevertheless interesting and varied. There are two fairly narrow formal terraces which run round the south and east of the house, with a much larger third terrace on the south. Beyond this is a lawn, crossed by a small stream, and then a triangular area of shrubbery.

The upper terrace on the east has a partly concrete surface left from the Second World War, and rectangular raised beds have recently been constructed on this. Various small statues have also been added to the upper terraces, on both sides, though the pair of cranes at the bottom of the steps down to the lowest terrace on the south have been in this position since the late nineteenth century.

The layout of beds on the lower terrace on the east, now a row of circular rose beds in grass, has clearly been changed, and the line of the walk which used to run along the outer edge of this terrace can be seen. The large, lowest terrace on the south has a pool with fountain which was in place by the end of the last century, but the layout of beds surrounding it may not be original. The lawn and shrubbery beyond this are also shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1889, though they do not appear in any of the photographs at the house.

To the west is a wooded area without formal paths but with two or three attractive natural streams. This was included in the area named as 'pleasure grounds' on the map of 1860, and by then probably already had conifers added to the natural woodland. These have since been felled, leaving almost natural vegetation once again.

The terraces, lawns and shrubbery were all carved out of these wooded 'pleasure grounds'. A photograph taken in 1862 shows the top terrace south of the house, with no steps leading down, but a small gate. By 1867 the second terrace had been constructed, and the steps leading down to it built; the third terrace had been levelled and was in use as a croquet lawn. The upper two terraces were gravelled, and a plain, relatively narrow, flight of steps led down to the croquet lawn from the second terrace.

In 1870 the upper terrace on the east was gravelled and had no parapet wall. By 1873 the wall and steps between the upper and lower terraces on this side had been constructed; on the south side there was a delicate iron fence along the edge of the second terrace, and the croquet lawn below appeared to be disused. By 1890, however, the second flight of steps down to this level had been built to match the upper flight, and the pool and fountain, with a rose garden around, occupied the site of the croquet lawn. The main terrace wall on the east was as it is today, and the cranes at the bottom of the steps down to the fountain terrace were in place, one already being headless.

Photographs of the rear courtyard in the 1870s show a large stone-built dovecote which has since disappeared, and some large trees, including a yew, were there in 1870 but had been removed by 1872. There was a low wall all along the eastern side of the courtyard, like that which remains on the north-east; this has now been replaced on the east by delicate iron fencing (probably that which was removed from the edge of the second terrace on the south side). The cloister-like wall had not yet been built.

After Charles Williams conveyed Dolmelynlyn to his son in 1892, alterations seem to have ceased, and in fact Romer Williams mortgaged the property in 1894, then redeemed it and mortgaged it again before finally selling it in 1907, suggesting that he had little money to spend on improvements. The layout today is very similar to that shown on the 1889 map.

The kitchen garden is shown as an orchard on the estate map of 1860, and also appears in outline on the manuscript map of 1819. It therefore pre-dates most of the ornamental garden. The small orchard to the north is not, however, shown on either map, and it is likely that this was created and the original orchard turned over at least in part to vegetable and flower production at around the same time as the other major garden works were undertaken. By 1889 the southern part of the kitchen garden was planted as mixed woodland. The 1860 map shows the shape of the garden to be the same as at present, but gives no indication of any internal layout.

The garden lies just behind the house, on the west, and is basically square, with irregular extensions to south and east. It slopes steeply up to the west, the slope necessitating terracing of the northern part. It is surrounded by a stone wall, and contained only one small glasshouse in 1889, of which no trace remains.

There are entrances in the north wall near the centre and near the north-east corner, both disused and temporarily blocked up; in the east wall near the centre, which is currently the main entrance, and further north, the latter permanently blocked with stone; and in the south-east corner, where steps lead down to a revetted path. There is also a revetted path leading to the north-east entrance. These paths are shown on the 1889 map, as is one leading to the blocked doorway in the east wall; the other two entrances are presumably later. The entrance in the middle of the east wall certainly seems to have been made through the wall, and is approached by a sloping path above a terracing wall; there is a fairly sharp curve at the top with some iron fencing as there is quite a drop, the ground level within the garden being much higher than without (the east wall is partly a retaining wall). The path is hard-surfaced and fairly wide.



The walls themselves are dry-stone, about 1.2 m - 1.4 m high on the north and higher on the east and south; the west wall is inaccessible. The stone, like that in other dry-stone walls in the park and garden, has been shaped roughly.

Only a small area of the garden on the eastern side is currently in use, with a polytunnel and an extremely dilapidated small modern greenhouse; the rest is overgrown. Six terracing walls are shown in the northern part of the garden on the 1889 map; of these, the two lowest can be clearly seen and the next two can be found in the undergrowth, but the two highest are impossible to locate. The walls are dry-stone and, where they can be seen, less than a metre high, varying with the slope. The lowest has two clear access points, one retaining its steps.

The path east of the lowest terrace remains clear, and south of the end of the rest of the terraces a terrace wall continues along the upper (west) side of this, slightly offset and in a different style (much neater, mortared masonry). It is about 0.8 m high at its northern end, rising to over 1 m to the south, and may be later in date - it does not appear to be shown on the 1889 map. Above it is a water tank with a natural supply.

South of this the overgrown stub of the east-west wall dividing off the wooded part of the original garden can be seen. This southernmost area remains wooded, and has one terrace wall (not shown on the 1889 map) about 1.3 m high with a dilapidated corrugated iron shed above it. West of the terrace wall the area appears to slope naturally.

Fruit trees are shown on the 1889 map in the central and northern sections of the garden, but none can now be seen. There are, however, some hazel, ash and willow trees in the central area which show signs of having been coppiced in the past, and which appear to be planted in rows. The rest of the trees in the two northern sections of the garden are randomly self-sown, but mostly of no great age. Perhaps the coppiced trees indicate a later use of the garden before it became almost completely disused.

The orchard, to the north, is now part of the field again and the boundaries, whether walls or fences, have been carefully removed. Some dips in the ground may mark the former positions of trees. The area was part of a field in 1860 and had become an orchard by 1889. It was rectangular and fairly small, with the long axis running almost north-south.

## **Sources**

### **Primary**

Information from Mr J. Barkwith, including information given him by Ms Caroline Kerkham.

Estate map (1860), Merionnydd Archives, Z/DN/44.

Collection of photographs and other information held at the house.

Catalogue of Dolmelynlyn papers, Meirionnydd archives.

2-in. manuscript map for 1-in. first edition Ordnance Survey map (about 1819), University College of North Wales archives, Bangor

**Secondary**

Beamon, S P and Roaf, S, *The Ice-Houses of Britain*, 1990