

BRYNGWYN

Ref No	PGW(Po) 41 (POW)
OS Map	125
Grid Ref	SJ 177182
Former County	Powys
Unitary Authority	Powys
District	Montgomeryshire
Community Council	Meifod
Designations	Listed Building: House Grade II*. Site of Special Scientific Interest: coach house.
Site Evaluation	Grade II*
Primary reasons for grading	Fine example of a late eighteenth-century brick gentry house in a beautiful situation, surrounded by well preserved contemporary and early nineteenth-century landscape parkland. The house is one of the few Welsh commissions by Robert Mylne and is associated historically with some of the more important Welsh families.
Type of Site	House with small formal garden set in park with lake and intact shelter belts.
Main Phases of Construction	c. 1770, with additions or alterations c.1800 (following fire damage), c. 1813, c. 1914, c. 1989.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Bryngwyn is situated on the summit of a small hill surrounded by a circular park below and to the north-east of the village of Bwlch-y-cibau. A drive enters the site from the west and proceeds around and up the hill towards the house, which is hidden from the west park and approach by a plantation. The red brick, late eighteenth-century house faces south and east and looks out over a formal garden towards the east park. The house has two storeys and a tiled hipped roof with five symmetrical bays on the east and west fronts. In the centre of the west front there is a formal porch with Ionic columns and, parallel to its on the east front, a French window is set in a full height, three sided bay. A simple two-storey early nineteenth-century staff range abuts the house on the north-west side, creating the west side of a small

service court. The windows throughout are sashes. The house has been altered at several different dates. The most recent alterations, from 1989, include a pediment on the west front, over the three central bays, which is set with a bull's eye window and ornamented with ball finials. This addition was proposed in architectural drawings of the early nineteenth century. A large stone Edwardian porch, which itself replaced an earlier Victorian part glass porch/conservatory on the west front, was removed when the present porch was constructed. The interiors, by the principal house architect, Robert Mylne, are believed to be largely intact.

The earliest known reference to the site occurs in an anonymous article of 1872 in the Montgomeryshire Collections which states that in 1110 the land, and perhaps a dwelling, belonged to Howel Ab Meredydd of Llanfechain Iscoed. By the late sixteenth century the site had come into a Welsh family, perhaps directly descended from Howel Ab Meredydd, who took the anglicised name of Lloyd. In the 1590s 'Bryngwyn' was recorded in the occupation of John ap Robert Lloyd, who was buried in Llanfechain in 1613. No illustrations or descriptions of the first Bryngwyn are known but a house, probably a timber framed hall, had been built on or near the site of the present house within a small park by the mid 1500s when, according to T.M. Humphreys, it was 'uninhabited and decaying'. By the late 1630s the estate had passed to an heiress, Elizabeth Lloyd, who married John Kynaston of Plas Kynaston, Denbighshire. Their son, Humphrey, married Martha Owen of Woodhouse, Shropshire and their daughter, Mary, married a William Mostyn in 1771. On marriage William Mostyn came into possession of both the Bryngwyn and Woodhouse estates through his wife. In return he added her name to his, taking the title William Mostyn Owen.

Keen to improve the Bryngwyn estate Mostyn Owen commissioned the architect Robert Mylne to design a new house. Some landscaping had apparently already been carried out around the existing house. Mylne drew up plans for a new house in 1771 but apparently revised them following a visit to the site in 1773. A four square brick Palladian house resulted and further landscaping, including tree planting and perhaps the creation or ornamenting of a lake, was carried out.

Mostyn Owen's extravagance, exacerbated by gambling and time as a MP, plunged him into debt. In 1793 the house was damaged by fire which led, by 1802, to its partial abandonment in favour of Woodhouse. Soon afterwards Mostyn Owen sold the house and park, and much of the surrounding land, to try to clear his personal debt of at least £10,000. He later partly recouped his losses through mortgaging his remaining assets and selling life annuities.

The house and park were sold in 1802 to a Mr Gill, a cotton factor from Lancashire, keen to gentrify his industrial fortune. His son, Thomas, repaired and refurbished Bryngwyn as a 'tasty and comfortable mansion' which he sold to Mr Martin Williams, descended from the Williams family of Pant Howel, Carmarthenshire, who had made a fortune in sugar in Jamaica, in 1813. Williams carried out 'great and admirable improvements in the grounds and premises'. He employed Thomas Jones, a Chester architect, to make substantial enlargements to the house and to erect ancillary buildings. The lake was enlarged at this time and further ornamental grounds laid out. In 1825 the Williams family considered selling Bryngwyn, drawing up a simple and inaccurate plan and printing sales particulars but, in the event, the sale never took place.

On Martin Williams death in 1856 the estate was left jointly between four daughters - Mary, Frances, Kate and Elizabeth Charlotte. Kate, who remained unmarried, became the heiress and spent her life at Bryngwyn. She intended to leave the estate to her nephew, Martin, the eldest son of her sister Elizabeth Charlotte, who had married into the Sandbach family of Hafodunos, Denbighshire. Tragically Martin was killed in 1895 while hunting in Somaliland and his brother, Arthur, became heir. In 1903 Major General Arthur Edmund Sandbach and his wife, the Honourable Ina Douglas Pennant of Penrhyn Castle, inherited both Bryngwyn and the old family home of Old Hope, Jamaica. Arthur Sandbach embarked on a series of improvements at Bryngwyn, commissioning the architect A. McGarel Hogg to carry out alterations to the façade in 1914, which included the erection of a formal stone porch which has subsequently been removed. Photographs of the house dating from the late 1860s show that the house was being repaired and the parapet possibly removed. A simple half-span glass conservatory/porch had been erected on the west front which was replaced by the new porch. Arthur also worked on the garden, laying out a formal path and rose beds to the east of the house. On his death in 1928 his daughter, and only child, Geraldine, became heiress to both the Bryngwyn and Jamaican estates, as well as Hafodunos. For much of this century Bryngwyn was managed *in absentia* by Geraldine and her husband, Captain Laurie Mackeson Sandbach, who died in 1984. During that time grazing in the park continued but the house, which was unoccupied, and the garden declined. Since inheriting in about 1986 their daughter Auriol, the present owner, has embarked on a long-term programme of restoration.

A stable court stands immediately to the north of the house. The buildings are of brick with slate roofs and are grouped around a bricked yard. Three coach houses and two stable ranges remain. The roof space of the buildings is a noted Site of Special Scientific Interest (S.S.S.I), housing a colony of Lesser Horseshoe Bats (*Rhinolophus hipposiderous*). On the south, the storey above the coach house, once the laundry and grooms' room, has been converted into accommodation. On the east side of the stables a small walled enclosure has been cleared and an open air swimming pool constructed within it on the site of a rough vegetable garden. What appears to have been a lean-to brick ancillary building has been converted into a changing room/summer house. The south side of this area opens on to the garden. To the south of the converted stable building there is a small gravel/hardcore courtyard to the rear of the house. This is used for car parking and it is separated from the garden on the east by a brick wall which is about 1.8m high. In the north-east corner of this area, abutting the stable wall, there is a wood store and shed. The stable court buildings are attributed to Thomas Jones who was working at the site in 1813 for Martin Williams.

The park at Bryngwyn surrounds the house. It is roughly circular in shape and covers about 60 acres. The land in the park rises to a small summit on which the house was built. The park is particularly attractive, the natural glaciated landscape associated with this part of Montgomeryshire creates gentle undulating ground which was highlighted by judicious tree planting. No earth-moving is thought to have taken place and no known landscape designer to have been employed. An irregular curving shelter belt of mixed woodland surrounds the western, south-western and northern periphery of the park. To the south, the park is enclosed by the tree planted hillside of Bryngwyn Wood, known as 'Madams' Wood'; the actual park boundary is created by a lane which connects Bwlch-y-Cibau with Glanbrogan below this. A

boundary plantation stands on the east of the park and the open parkland is dotted with isolated, mainly oak, trees.

The drive enters the site from the A 490 in the west. There is no lodge and none has ever been recorded although Arthur Sandbach apparently planned one in the early part of this century. The drive proceeds up a shallow valley towards the house. Above the drive on the north there is a sparse line of oak trees which may be a relict field boundary or a park feature. New planting has taken place throughout the park. The line of a second drive is also evident, crossing the park from the south-west corner. The only noted intrusions into the park area have occurred on the south-west boundary where the old village smithy, which was sold off during the 1970s, is now an enlarged house set in a private garden.

The early history of the park is unclear but it appears that there has been some sort of park in existence since at least the Kynaston ownership up to 1771, as a reference to the pre-Mylne house described it looking out onto a 'landscape park'. The extent and appearance of this park is unclear although it is known that a pool or pond (the lake) was already in existence, which was enlarged by later work, and that William Mostyn Owen had been establishing 'many plantations as well useful as ornamental which will make money one day!' The park which survives today is, however, mainly the work of Martin Williams, dating from 1813. He appears to have been sympathetic to the ideas of the picturesque movement, no doubt partly influenced through his wife, Mary, the niece of Mr William Alexander Madocks of Tremadoc, Caernarvonshire, an exponent of the Picturesque, who had been advised by J. C. Loudon in 1806. Contemporary accounts recorded Williams 'planting largely', 'demolishing numerous fences' and 'forming the whole into a park like enclosure'. Williams's work is recorded on a tithe map of 1840 which shows the irregular northern shelter belts, the enlarged lake and the wood on Bryngwyn hill, which became known as 'Madams' wood' in honour of his wife. A woodland to the west of the house, which partly survives, is also marked, as is a triangular plantation to the east, which does not. Confusingly the tithe map marks the whole of the southern park as 'plantation with another plantation within'. Trees are only recorded on the 'plantation within'. The original drive, which approached the house from the south-west, is known to date from at least 1825 when it was recorded on the map included in the sale particulars of that date. The same drive is clearly recorded on the tithe map of 1840. In 1840 a ha-ha is recorded along the line of the present ha-ha within the garden area but also continuing to the west around the west plantation. The ha-ha is most unusual in being built mostly of fossil stones. A walk or dog-cart drive is also recorded running inside the perimeter in this area as well as other paths within the garden to the east of the house.

The Ordnance Survey map of 1889 records the park in much the same manner, with the exception of the triangular plantation which had been lost by this time and the addition of the present drive to the north of the original one, entering the park opposite Bryngwyn cottages. A line of trees is also shown running to the north-east between the two drives. The purpose of this feature is unclear - perhaps it denoted an earlier field boundary, despite not being recorded on the tithe map of 1840, or else to serve as a screen between the drives. The 'plantation within' still stood at this time in the southern park. It is unclear when the south-west drive fell out of use, as it is still clearly recorded on the Ordnance Survey map of 1905, or when the trees between the drives began to be lost. Tree stumps occur throughout the west park. Confusingly the present Ordnance Survey map marks the park boundary to the south of

the lake within the actual park boundary. The reason for this is unclear.

The gardens lie to the east and south of the house and, including the lake, cover about 18 acres. A French window, set in a three sided bay on the east front, opens on to a small roughly level and raised area of lawn which is enclosed along the south by a fossil stone ha-ha. Two dressed stone steps lead down from the French window on to a grassed over walk which runs down the centre of a small, rectangular area of what appears to have been formal garden. It is surrounded by the lines of other paths and at its centre there is a raised circular feature, possibly a flowerbed, all lost beneath the turf. The central walk creates an east axis which continues for about 15m to reach a further pair of wide stone steps which descend on to a more informal tree and shrub planted lawn which slopes about 20m to the east to an iron fence boundary. Large clumps of mature rhododendrons, azaleas, Japanese maples and many new plantings, together with trees and roses, grow along the north side of this area which is defined by a shelter belt. In the north-east of this area a new hard tennis court has been constructed on a raised platform which extends out into the park. On the south front of the house a narrow strip of sloping lawn, planted with a large mature larch, runs down to the ha-ha. This slope is uneven and suggests a possible earlier layout. Beyond the ha-ha a wide, tree planted sloping lawn, which includes many fine oaks and a mature tulip tree, sweeps down to the northern edge of the lake. The ha-ha stands about 0.6m high and runs about 5m from the south-west corner of the house curving around for about 40m to the east, to the central walk steps. Two large mature yew trees stand above the ha-ha on the south-east of the formal garden area. A third yew of comparable age stands on the north side of the garden. These yew trees are the oldest plantings in the garden, possibly associated originally with the earlier house. A flower border runs along the south side of the ha-ha. Opposite the south front of the house a set of six stone steps bisect the ha-ha to begin a new axis which runs south as a mown grass path down to the lake and across a new causeway into the park. To the south of the informal east lawn there is a level terrace, a croquet lawn, on a north-east/south-west alignment, which is enclosed by young yew hedges. To the south-west of this a new rectangular formal rose garden has been laid out with brick edged beds and cruciform gravel paths. Iron rose arches cross over the central west/east and north/south paths and shrub roses, trained and tied against wooded posts, grow in the beds. At the western end of the central path a single dressed stone step descends leads on to the tree planted lawn. The lawn continues east, along the south of the new formal garden, to the garden boundary.

The lake covers about 9 acres and is in two sections. The northern section, which lies partly outside the garden within the east park, is linear in form. This joins an oblong pool at a new causeway to the south of the garden and the house. On the south side of the causeway an iron gate leads into the park. Trees and shrubs grow around the bank of the lake and wild fowl and ducks inhabit it. Until recently a timber boat house stood on the north bank of the pool to the south of the house.

To the west of the house and separated from it by a gravelled forecourt, there is an area of lawn of about 3/4 acre that runs into a small woodland which straddles the park boundary to the north and west. New timber posts planted up with climbing roses are positioned along the woods' edge. To the south, the lawn slopes down to the drive as it approaches the house. Young trees and shrubs grow along its southern edge and a headstone commemorating a dog, Jester, stands nearby.

The early history of the ornamental garden at Bryngwyn is unclear. It is assumed that some sort of garden, whether ornamental or productive, would have been associated with the Lloyd and Kynaston house but no recognisable evidence of any garden from this period survives apart from the presence of three yew trees which appear to be up to 300 years old. The trees stand to the south-east and north-west of the house and may mark the boundary of an earlier garden. William Mostyn Owen is credited with 'ornamenting' his grounds from about 1770 but it is unknown if a garden or flower garden was laid at that time. Unfortunately this is also the case with Martin Williams but taking into account his general improvements and long tenure, it is assumed that an ornamental garden would have been in existence from about 1830. This garden may be recorded on an undated watercolour sketch of about 1830/40. There are many other amateur watercolours of the house and grounds, including an Ingleby water colour of about 1800. The sketch shows the park and garden from the south-east recording the east garden area with an open character containing a few trees and, what appear to be, circular shrubberies. The form of any nineteenth century garden would have been partly dictated by the presence of the ha-ha which is known to have been in position since at least 1825 - its own position possibly determined by the yew trees - when it was recorded on a map included in the sale particulars. On the tithe map of 1840 the ha-ha actually appears to have been extended to the west of the house enclosing woodland, the present wood and lawn. A circuit walk, or dog-cart ride, was also recorded within the area on the tithe map as was another other circuit walk in the garden area to the east, which was retained at least until 1889 when it was recorded on the Ordnance Survey map. In the tithe descriptions both the areas to the west and east of the house were described as 'garden and shrubbery'.

The ha-ha seems to have retained its divisional role between garden and park at least until 1889 as the Ordnance Survey map clearly shows that the 'garden' area clearly confined within it. The scale of the map prevents the recording of features within the garden, such as footpaths and flower beds, and it would seem that the east garden was a tree planted lawn, perhaps with some areas of shrubbery along its north side. This interpretation is borne out by photographs dating from about 1868 which record a simple uneven lawn and a few shrubs together with the southern yew trees that may show a just a simple layout or a degraded earlier garden. The photographs also record a larch growing to the south of the house, which survives, and climbers and creepers growing against the house walls.

From 1903 Arthur Sandbach and his wife Ina began to develop the east garden. Straight formal gravel paths, possibly reinstatements of Victorian paths, were laid out around the south and east of the house with a long, sloping straight walk leading east from the bay window to, by about 1910, a small paved terrace which was enclosed along the east by a high brick wall. Photographs dating from about 1909 record their work and show flower beds of roses and annuals cut out of the lawn to the north and south of this walk and at least two circular beds, containing annual bedding, which were created along the south front of the house. Two stone steps set into the walk survive in the present garden. In the east garden roses were also grown against wooden posts and shrubs were planted in the lawn to the north of the walk. Between 1903 and about 1940 the garden was extended beyond the ha-ha further to the east. A photograph of about 1909 records an iron fence running near the small terrace but later photographs, dating from about 1914, show the garden boundary, apparently the same fence, about 25-30m further to the east. An old oak which stands to the west of the

present tennis court appears to mark the extent of the pre-1914 garden boundary. Informal plantings of shrubs, Irish yews, a rose garden enclosed by holly hedges (on the site of the present rose garden) and a croquet lawn, which was later partly used as a tennis court, were laid out in this new area of garden. A photograph, contemporary to these improvements, also suggests that another set of steps, since lost, were inserted into the ha-ha to reach the south-east part of the extended garden. In the present garden, the central circular bed dates to at least 1868, when it is shown on a photograph.

In about 1909, according to both map and photographic evidence, a small sheltering woodland, now depleted, ran from the north-east end of the ha-ha out into the east park. To the west of the house a second length of iron fencing also appears to have been progressively moved south, increasing the area of the west lawn and taking more of the drive into the garden.

The garden gradually declined from the late 1920s following the death of Arthur Sandbach. The paths and flower beds and rose garden were lost beneath the grass or became overgrown. The wall of the small terrace gradually collapsed and was removed, along with the terrace, by the present owner in the early 1990s. The Japanese maples, Irish yew and rhododendrons planted between about 1903 and 1928 grew to become the present mature plantings.

The kitchen garden lay at the north-eastern end of the lake on the south side of a plantation on a small piece of west sloping ground. It covers about 1 acre in extent. A small dew pond lies near the west end of the garden, above the lake. A small stone bridge connects the kitchen garden area to the park on the east of the garden. Little trace of the garden survives beyond some rusting iron stands which mark the position of a fruit cage. The area is planted up with young oaks and noble firs.

The form of the kitchen garden has not changed since at least 1840 when it was recorded on a tithe map as 'garden'. The garden was defined by beech hedges the north-east and south-east of which survive as belts of semi-mature trees. By 1889 a short length of brick wall had been built on the north-east, within the garden, to support a Victorian glasshouse on its south-western face. On the 1889 Ordnance Survey map the garden is recorded covering about 1-2 acres with internal perimeter paths and cross paths, which divided the interior into quarters. In the centre of the garden there was a circular dew pond. The glasshouse, which stood until the 1940s or 1950s, appears to have had a central projection. A separate service area lay to the east of the garden, with a small area of orchard to the south-east, just within the park boundary. The garden is included on the tithe map of 1840 and was probably the work of the Williams family in the early nineteenth century. Due to its inclusion on the tithe map of 1840 it is believed that the garden was contemporary with the house of about 1770. The garden was maintained until the house was shut up in 1928. In the 1950s the area was planted up with conifers, which have recently been felled and replanted with oaks and firs. The glasshouse and wall were either removed, or collapsed, during the 1940s and 1950s.

Sources

Primary Photographs (c.1868, c. 1900, c.1914), 1825 sale particulars, undated

Watercolour sketch c. 1830, estate maps and brief history. Private collection.
Sandbach papers 1813-57. M/D/SAND. Powys Record Office. (Presently closed from 1900)

John Ingleby watercolour of Bryngwyn, the 'New Seat of William Mostyn Esq' c. 1800. PD 9170. The National Library of Wales. (This watercolour also contains a distant view of neighbouring Glanbrogan Hall to the east.)

1840 Tithe map. The National Library of Wales.

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