

## **DOLDOWLOD**

<b>Ref No</b>	<b>PGW (Po) 52 (POW)</b>
<b>OS Map</b>	147
<b>Grid Ref</b>	SN 997625
<b>Former County</b>	Powys
<b>Unitary Authority</b>	Powys
<b>District</b>	Radnorshire
<b>Community Council</b>	Llanyre/Nantmell
<b>Designations</b>	None known
<b>Site Evaluation</b>	<b>Grade II</b>
<b>Primary reasons for grading</b>	Interesting compact nineteenth-century park and garden set in a bend of the river Wye in a fine situation. Formal grass terraces and wild woodland area in garden. Attractive lodge and formal gates.
<b>Type of Site</b>	Victorian mansion set in modestly sized grounds, was originally a holiday residence.
<b>Main Phases of Construction</b>	c. 1820, c. 1878

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

Doldowlod House stands against a steep hanging wood below the A 470 on a level terrace looking out to the south-west over a small, semi-circular area of park set in a bend in the river Wye. Beyond the Wye the land rises steeply to the wooded slopes of Trembyd mountain, part of a range which continues to the north and south, enclosing the valley. The family estate encompasses much of this land and little development beyond the old farms has occurred, leaving the house in a private, but beautiful, setting. Theophilus Jones, in his 'History of Brecknockshire' made much of the 'magnificent seat' of Doldowlod which 'commanded views of the neighbourhood'. The house is of a compact neo-Elizabethan design and eccentric in style. It is two- and three-storey, made of roughly faced stone with moulded sandstone dressings. The west front has six bays, the northern one of which is a tower topped with a leaded cupola. The second and sixth bays stand proud from the house, whereas the central three are recessed. A stone, Elizabethan-style single-storey porch stands on the centre of the three recessed bays and the second-storey third-bay is set with an oriel window. The third and sixth bays also have ornate gables, a feature repeated on the south-east bay of the south

front. The roof is slated with ornamental iron ridges, in the centre of which are sited Elizabethan-style stacks. The south front has four bays, the fourth, to the east, being a gable. Two dormer windows occur on this side on the first and third bay. Ornamental leaded windows occur throughout.

The house dates from at least the 1820s, when James Watt, JP of Greenock, son of James Watt, improver of the steam engine, acquired an old stone farm house, sited below the Builth Wells - Rhayader road, together with the surrounding land as a summer/sport retreat. The farmhouse was integrated into a new Gothic-style house which was later remodelled in about 1878 into the present house by James Watt Gibson-Watt. He based the design of the house on the family's main seats of Aston Hall, near Birmingham and Heathfield Hall, Staffordshire. A double-storey gabled extension on the north, which contained the old kitchen, was demolished in the 1940s. A timber heated greenhouse has since been erected on its site. The family became one of the principal landowners in mid-Wales, their possessions extended to part of the nearby spa town of Llandrindod Wells. The family took the prefix Gibson-Watt in the late 1800s. The house and land has remained in the hands of the family; the present Lord Gibson-Watt inherited in 1939.

A service/stable court, dating to c. 1830/50, lies immediately to the north of Doldowlod House. This area is surrounded by a stone wall, which is about 1.6m high, on the south and west. An entrance gate, set with integrated piers, occurs in the south wall, but there are no gates. Individual single and two-storey stone, slate roof buildings stand on the west side of the court. Near a northern entrance, to the east of the north-west corner of the court, there is what appears to have been a carriage house, now used as a garage. The north of the court is enclosed by an L-shaped range which contains stables, stores and workshops. On the north of the stables there is a small wall- enclosed paddock or yard. A virtually identical enclosure occurs opposite, to the west, to the rear of the carriage house. The north service drive, which exits the service/stable court between the enclosures, proceeds up hill to the north-east, past an old corrugated iron barn, to an entrance on the A 470. A short line of white picket fence defines this entrance. A two-storey building on the east side of this range contains a flight of steep stone stairs which lead up into an accommodation/store area which has been converted into a flat. A slate sundial is set on the west face of this building. To the south of this, what appears to have been a service track rises on a steep diagonal out of the yard, behind the stable range, up a steeply sloping piece of ground, to a blocked up door in the boundary wall. This stone boundary wall encloses the entire house and garden area along the west of the A 470. The sloping ground between the wall and the two-storey building is now used as a rough garden area for the flat. Between the north-east of the house and the court there is a two-storey former rendered staff range, dating from about 1830, set on a south-east alignment. This slate roof building opens on to a small, narrow partly paved court which connects to the remaining service/scullery area of the house.

The small park at Doldowlod lies between the house and garden and the river Wye, on the river's floodplain. The park covers about 25 acres and is separated from the formal garden by a stone ha-ha and fencing. To the west of the house the park is level, only rising slightly to the north. Planting within the park is sparse but some mature trees, including copper beech, lime and horse chestnut, still stand. The park created an uninterrupted area of pasture which balanced the gardens of the house with the surrounding, wilder countryside. Field boundaries

only occur to the north-west of the house, beyond the view of the principal rooms. A field boundary recorded on the present Ordnance Survey map to the south of the house has been removed. It is believed that this boundary was defined by a park fence and not a hedge. The line of an abandoned drive can still be seen in the park. This ran from a gate, set in the ha-ha to the north-west of the house, in a curve to the north to a fine set of formal gates, on the west side of the A 470, about 1/2 km to the north-west of the house. A track runs along the northern edge of the park to the south-east where it meets a second track, entering the site from the north-east, which continues on to Ystrad farm.

The early history of the park is unclear but it is assumed that it was used as grazing/water meadow land by the old farm. The appearance of the present park is believed to date from about 1830, following the erection of a new house by the Watt family. The structural features, the ha-ha and the north drive are thought to date from this time and are recorded on a tithe map of 1844. Simple tree planting in the park occurred throughout the nineteenth century. A scattered semi-circular arrangement of trees is recorded on the First and Second Ordnance Survey maps on the east park boundary. At least two of these trees survive to the south of the tennis court. It is not thought that any landscaping, apart from the creation of the drive, took place. The park drive is believed to have been abandoned after the Second World War. A footpath ran along the northern edge of the park between 1888 and 1904, entering the park to the east of the ha-ha over a small stone bridge, which survives. This path continued to the south-east, below the kitchen garden, into Holmes Wood to conclude at the Holmes farm.

The garden of Doldowlod lies to the south and south-east of the house. It is a linear garden set between a steep downward slope beneath a stone wall on the west of the old road, now the A 470, and the level park, with the house at its northern end. The garden covers about seven acres. In the immediate vicinity of the house, to the south, there is a formal area of garden characterised by three cut grass terraces to the west of a gravel forecourt, which descend to the ha-ha. An axis runs west from the house porch across the forecourt down the terraces, via sets of stone steps, to a stone bridge/gate which leads into the park. Another part of the formal garden, a level circular lawn, lies to the immediate south-east of the house. On the east side of this lawn, built into the rocky bank descending from the road above, there is a stepped stone Italianate garden and summer house. To the north-east of the grass terraces there is a gateway through which the old north drive approached the house. In the garden a metalled drive runs from this gate, east to the forecourt and north into the service/stable court. To the north of this drive, and west of the stable court, there is a small hedged rectangular enclosure which contains a swimming pool.

The grass garden terraces follow the line of the ha-ha for about 30m to the south where they curve back into the garden to conclude on the west side of the south drive. This drive leads to the south-east on ground that gradually rises. On the east side of the drive tree planted lawn gives way to hanging wood, on a continuation of the steep slope below the road. The drive proceeds for about 150m where it leaves the garden, and site, to the north of an ornamental lodge. To the south-west of this drive the land continues to slope down, towards the park.

The south-eastern garden is mainly composed of mature tree and shrub planted lawns which include rhododendron, Douglas fir, redwood and a particularly attractive small beech and oak wood. The garden is damp and fertile and many of the trees paths and features within it are

covered with moss and lichen. To the south of the terraces there is a small dell, of about 1/4 acre, which is planted with a prunus walk on a north/south alignment. From the drive paths lead down towards this and to the south-east where the garden becomes increasingly wooded. In the south-eastern area two natural streams have been developed as garden features. One lies about 10m down the drive from the house, where a stream crosses underneath the drive to enter a narrow stone-lined channel. This channel leads to the south-west and a stone-lined path runs along beneath it. The second stream, in the southern part of the garden, descends over a cascade into a large oval pool which is surrounded on its east side by stone terraces and paths. A second, small cascade takes the water on from this pool into a smaller rectangular pool near the park boundary. To the north of these features there is an irregular short length of serpentine stone path enclosed by bamboo hedges. Below the pools, to the north-west, there is an abandoned tennis court on the park boundary. The park boundary is marked in this part of the garden by a mixture of nineteenth-century iron park fence and modern stock proofing. The garden is concluded in the south by a small, but steep sided valley, which carries a fast running stream from Groffty Wood, on the east of the A 470, down to the Wye. The early history of the garden area is unclear and it is possible that the sloping ground to the south-east of the farmhouse was not cleared of natural wood until the purchase of the site by the Watts in the early nineteenth century. If the land had been cleared then it is more likely that it was used as fold, or yard space, for the farm and not as an ornamental garden. The garden at Doldowlod is believed to be contemporary with the house and, until the 1870s, to have been managed wooded pleasure grounds that looked out over the park. The remodelling of the house in the 1870s many well have initiated work in the gardens, creating the grass terraces above the ha-ha to the west and seeing the erection of a large conservatory to the south of the house, which contained a rockwork grotto. The mother of the present owner is known to have carried out a lot of work in the garden in the period 1890-1930. The conservatory was taken down in the 1920s and stone Italianate garden terraces created on its site. Geometric parterre beds were also created and later removed from the top terrace and the south circular lawn during this time. At this time the estate employed four gardeners. The prunus walk is believed to date from about 1940, as does a small area of rock garden on the south end of the grass terraces. Many of the trees within the garden appear to be about 100 years old. The mature clumps of rhododendron appear to date from the early part of this century. More recently, the present Lady Gibson-Watt has created the pool garden and the bamboo walk. The pool garden dates from about the 1960s, the walk from about 1990. Most of the paths within the southern garden are believed to be those marked on the 1888 Ordnance Survey map. This also recorded two summer houses, one in the south-east corner of the garden, which was reached by a zig-zag path below the kitchen garden, and one about mid-way along the length of the drive to the east, probably within the hanging wood. No trace of either of these buildings is known to survive. The tennis court is believed to date from the 1920s and the swimming pool from the 1960s. The swimming pool was built on the site of an earlier croquet lawn.

The walled kitchen garden at Doldowlod stands about 1/4 km to the south-east of the house on the west side of the A 470. The garden is located on the northern end of a piece of ground which stands above the level of the garden to the north. The walled kitchen garden covers about 1 acre and slopes down to the west. It is surrounded by high, intact, stone-capped, red brick walls which descend the north and south sides in a series of wide steps. The walls stand up to about 4m high. The east garden wall curves slightly to the south-east, following the line

of the road. To the south of the garden there is a second fenced enclosure which contains semi-mature Christmas trees. This enclosure is marked on the 1888 Ordnance Survey map but it is unclear if it was ever walled.

The garden is entered on its north side through a simple, central wooden door. A steep stone-lined path leads up from the iron bridge to the door. On the south of the door there is a single-storey red brick bothy, now used for storage. To the north there is a two-storey bothy, again used for storage, beyond which are the footings of further buildings, including what appears to have been a stove house. Iron rimmed circular holes survive in the wall. The west and south external garden walls were not recorded due to overgrown woodland which prevented access. The interior of the garden is now used as a Christmas tree nursery. According to map evidence the garden was divided into quarters by cruciform paths. These stone-edged paths partly survive. In the centre of the garden there is a wide, stone-edged pool which has been abandoned but which still holds water. A central path connects this with the garden door on the west, and an identical door on the east which leads into the south enclosure. To the north of the pool the stumps of cut Christmas trees survive in long rough grass. Immediately to the north of the western door three narrow stone steps lead up into a glasshouse which survives only as footings. A raised bed abuts the north wall. This glasshouse is about 3m wide. The footings of dismantled greenhouses continue up the north wall. Some still contain iron heating pipes but all other traces have gone. Nearby there are broken brick frames, partly hidden in the grass. In the north-east corner of the garden there is what appears to be a bricked up door and window connecting to the road. Along the length of the west face of the east wall a few fine specimens of trained espalier apple and pear trees survive. In the east a few relict standard apples grow in a line about 2m in from the wall. Near the north corner a few cold frames have been rescued and now serve as a small vegetable garden for the family. To the south of the west door there is a derelict free-standing, double aisled glasshouse which appears to date from about 1900. The cast iron roof supports remain but the frame of the glasshouse has evidently been repaired at some point as it is a mixture of new timber and aluminium. This glasshouse contains heating pipes but there is no sign of a boiler or a stoke hole. To the south of the greenhouse is the site of a peach house. This house extended down most of the remaining length of the wall and iron stanchions, which held the glass roof in place, remain embedded in the wall. About 3m out from the wall some brickwork also remains. The entire north wall is studded with nails and nail holes. In the north-west corner, two overgrown plum trees grow against the wall.

In 1904 an additional bothy or service building is recorded on the south face of the south wall of the kitchen garden on the Ordnance Survey map but it is unclear if this structure survives.

The estate is bisected by the A 470 road and the head gardener's house stands opposite the garden on the east side of the road. From map evidence this simple two-storey stone and slate house stands in the north-west corner of a third enclosure. The history and purpose of this enclosure is unclear. It may have been an extension to the walled garden, perhaps functioning as a tree nursery for the wider estate.

The walled kitchen garden is contemporary with the house, probably dating from around 1850 or 1870. The surviving interior is Victorian/Edwardian in appearance. There were at least

four greenhouses, at least two of which appear to have been heated. The glasshouses and garden probably began to decline after the First World War when the availability of staff began to decline. The free-standing glasshouse appears to have been in use until fairly recently. The trained fruit trees on the east wall appear to date from about 1900. Christmas trees have been grown in the garden since at least the 1970s.

## Sources

- Primary** Oil painting showing interior of conservatory c. 1890. Private collection.  
Photograph of the west front of Doldowlod c. 1900, private collection (the Dderw)  
1844 tithe map. National Library of Wales.
- Secondary** Haslam R., The Buildings of Powys (1979), p. 273  
Jones, T., The History of Brecknockshire (Glanusk edn 1909), p. 224  
Williams, Revd. J., The History of Radnorshire (1859; 1905 edn), p. 65, 385.