

HALKYN CASTLE

Ref No PGW (C) 68

OS Map 117

Grid Ref SJ 209 709

Former County Clwyd

Unitary Authority Flintshire

Community Council Halkyn

Designations Conservation Area: Halkyn (all of garden except walled garden and nursery)

Site Evaluation Grade II

Primary reasons for grading

Survival of a grand but largely informal garden, with small adjoining park, of a secondary residence of the Grosvenor family, little altered since its creation in the 1820s.

Type of Site

Terraced garden; informal woodland garden; walled garden; small landscape park

Main Phases of Construction

1820s

SITE DESCRIPTION

Halkyn Castle is a romantic and picturesque mansion situated on the east flank of the Halkyn Mountain, overlooking the Dee estuary. It was built by the Grosvenor family, who owned the nearby mineral workings, as an occasional residence, and was used by them mainly as a sporting lodge. The house was designed by John Buckler for the second Earl Grosvenor, and was built between 1824 and about 1827. It is a modestly sized two- and three-storey mansion, built of stone in castellated Tudor style. The windows are mullioned and transomed. The main entrance of a single-storey porch is on the north-west side. The parapets are not castellated, but small corner turrets and many chimneys enliven the skyline. In the south corner is an octagonal tower topped by battlements and machicolations. The house was enlarged in 1886 with the addition of a drawing room in the north-east corner for the first Duke of Westminster. This was designed by Douglas & Fordham. The village church of St Mary's originally stood just to the north of the house, but this was removed by the Duke of Westminster, and rebuilt further north in 1877-78.

To the south of the house is the stable court, built at the same time as the house, and also designed by Buckler. This is entered through a four-centred archway on the east side, over which is a pediment with a heraldic shield featuring a sheaf of wheat in the centre. The yard is walled on the west side, bounded by the house on the north, by a wall and outhouses on the east, and by a plain two-storey stable building on the south.

To the south-east of the house and garden is a very small area of landscaped ground. Originally a long drive led from an entrance and lodge on the A55 road westward through Castle Wood and past this parkland to

the east front of the house. This drive is now disused, although still open as a track, and the new A55 road has blocked the entrance.

The park was probably laid out with the gardens and drives, in the 1820s-30s, and is shown with them on the 1871 Ordnance Survey map. An early nineteenth-century map of the village and castle shows a rather different layout, with a straight drive from the north, and a road cutting through the grounds from the church south-westwards. Various buildings not in existence are also shown. It may be that this is a plan of proposals that were not carried out. The castellated lodge was probably designed by Buckler, and is contemporary with the house. The park consists of an irregular area of open grassland, sloping to the north-east, bounded on all but the north side by deciduous woodland. In the middle is a large clump of deciduous trees. The north-east side of the open area is a narrow strip of woodland flanking the east drive. This stops where the garden begins, giving a view of the park from the garden, from which it is divided by white painted iron railings. The woodland on the south side of the park merges with that of the garden, to the west of the house. Within it, to the south of the house, is a gently sloping open grass area marked on maps as 'Nursery': this was probably once a tree nursery or nursery garden.

The gardens of Halkyn Castle were probably laid out at the same time as the house was built, in c. 1824-27, with additional planting through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. They are shown in their present form on the 1871 Ordnance Survey map. As this was not the family's primary residence it appears that they were laid out for minimum maintenance, with a large area of informal woodland, and only a small area of formal terraced garden, with one small ornamental walled garden, and no kitchen garden. The gardens are laid out on ground sloping to the east, between the village of Halkyn on the east and the B5123 road on the west. The old church and churchyard of St Mary's was engulfed on the east side of the woodland, and the church was removed slightly later.

The gardens consist largely of ornamental woodland laid out with winding rustic paths of earth, gravel and stone, and stone steps. The house is situated towards the southern end of the woodland area, which to the south of the house merges with the park woodland. The woodland is mixed coniferous and deciduous, and contains many ornamental trees, including a large monkey puzzle to the west of the house, large beeches, pines and yews. The present entrance, one of the two original entrances, is on the B5123 road at the north end of the garden. It is flanked by stone walls, with a single-storey battlemented stone lodge in Tudor style. The drive winds through the woodland to the forecourt on the north side of the house, and continues around the east side to the stable court and the former drive from the east. Between the drive and the house is a raised gravel terrace in two compartments surrounded by low stone walls, and with stone steps up to it. There is a similar terrace in front of the stable block, which continues along its south side, where it is built into the slope. A drawing by J.C.Buckler dated 1826, of the entrance to the stable court, shows a drive curving round to the entrance, and no terracing. This must have been added between then and 1871. Below the terraces are sloping lawns, with a rectangular level area, formerly lawn tennis courts, cut into the slope at the south end.

From the terrace south of the stable block a curving, shallow-stepped path of rustic stone leads up through ornamental shrubs in woodland to a wooden door at the north end of a small walled garden. The path is flanked on the east by topiary yew cones and purple cherries. The walled garden is rectangular, orientated north-west/south-east, with an apsidal south-east end. The rubble walls are c. 1.5-1.8 m high, built of a reddish stone. Inside the east wall is a large fig tree. The path, here grassed over gravel, continues round the outside of the east side of the

garden to the former Nursery and beyond to the gate on the boundary. Inside, the garden is laid out formally. A path leads from the door across the north-west end to wooden steps over the south-west wall. A crazy-paving stone path runs lengthwise down the middle of the garden. It is flanked by small rectangular rose beds cut in grass. This area is bounded on the east and west by clipped box edging with gaps in the centre of each side. Narrow grassed over gravel paths runs along the outside of the hedges. The southern end of the garden is taken up with an apsidal arbour of clipped yew hedging, the north sides of which curve around towards the central path, leaving a wide opening. The path enters the arbour, where it widens into a rectangular paved area on which are two modern benches.

Sources

Primary

Drawing of stable court entrance by J.C. Buckler (1826): Pratt, D., and A.G. Veysey, A Handlist of the Topographical Prints of Clwyd (1977), no. 726.

'Rough draft of an estate in the parish of Flint, Halkin and Northop ...', by R.G. Dawson (1846): Clwyd Record Office (Hawarden), D/GR/1714.

'Halkyn village, church, castle, grounds etc.', n.d. (early nineteenth century): Clwyd Record Office (Hawarden), D/GR/1721.

Secondary

Hubbard, E., Clwyd (1986), p. 359.

COLWYN BAY: THE FLAGSTAFF (WELSH MOUNTAIN ZOO)

Ref No PGW (C) 69

OS Map 116

Grid Ref SH 837 788

County Clwyd

District Colwyn BC

Community Council Colwyn Bay

Designations None

Site Evaluation Grade II

Primary reasons for grading

Partial remains of formal and informal gardens laid out by T.H. Mawson in 1898-99 on fine site overlooking Colwyn Bay.

Type of Site

Formal terraced garden; informal woodland garden.

Main Phases of Construction

1898-99

SITE DESCRIPTION

The Flagstaff, now occupied by the Welsh Mountain Zoo, is a 37-acre estate situated on high ground above Colwyn Bay. At the end of the nineteenth century the land was purchased by a Manchester surgeon, Dr Walter Whitehead, who commissioned the architect Dan Gibson to design a house and the landscape architect Thomas Mawson to lay out the gardens. The gardens were made in 1898-99, along with the gatehouse, outbuildings, and glasshouses. But the grand mansion planned was never built, and Whitehead lived in retirement in the gatehouse. This is situated on the south side of the gardens, next to the Mochdre road. It is a two-storey half-timbered and rendered building, in vernacular style, with a central arch and mullioned windows. It is now used for zoo offices. The house was to have been situated between the east range of outbuildings and the present rockery pools to the north.

Running northwards from the gatehouse, on either side of a central gravelled former drive are ranges of stone outbuildings and yards. The glasshouses lie on the eastern side of the east range. The yard walls are high, with heavy stone coping and balls over arched doorways.

The gardens occupy a spectacular site on high ground at the southern edge of the town of Colwyn Bay, with extensive views from the highest part on the western side over Colwyn Bay and westwards. The gatehouse, outbuildings and formal gardens occupy a high plateau in the south-western part of the garden. To the east and north the ground drops steeply, and this area is occupied by extensive woodland of mixed deciduous and coniferous trees. To the north-west of the formal gardens is the highest point in the estate, a grassy knoll the top of which is now occupied by the Flagstaff bistro and bar. Since 1963 the gardens have been home to the Welsh Mountain Zoo, and have been overlain by zoo structures, particularly in the upper formal part, where many animal and bird cages have been built, and a car park made on the western side.

However, enough of the fabric remains to be able to discern the general layout.

A drawing of the proposed layout of the gardens by Thomas Mawson shows formal compartments to the south and east of the house, laid out with simple rectilinear beds, walls, and glasshouse ranges. Some of the paths, terraces, walls, and all the glasshouses remain. The woodland was developed with walks, and the three main existing paths are by Mawson. The gardens were altered after Walter Whitehead's day, in particular in the 1930s, when the rockery and water garden were made, and a pond built near the present main entrance (now gone). One feature from Dr Whitehead's time that has completely disappeared, and whose location is not known, is a garden building known as 'the shanty', seen in a contemporary photograph.

The original entrance (now exit), besides the gatehouse, was at the south-east corner of the estate, off the road leading down into the town. On the north side of the entrance is a small, simple rendered lodge with tall chimneys similar to those of the gatehouse. Square stone piers topped by stone hemispheres are set into the stone boundary wall. Inside the entrance the drive is rock-cut on its west side. It winds up through the woodland to a gateway with iron gates flanked by similar piers and hemispheres to those at the entrance. It then continues up through the woodland, curving around the slope to the present car park and to the outbuildings and gatehouse. The present main entrance is off the Mochdre road, to the east of the gatehouse, and was made for the zoo in 1963. This runs northwards to the main drive.

The main area of formal gardens lies to the east and north-east of the outbuildings. The original glasshouse lies on the east side of the east range of outbuildings. It is a lean-to glasshouse with two small extensions projecting eastwards. Originally there were vineries and peach cases extending eastwards where the reptile house and alligator beach are now. To the east of the glasshouse is a rectangular garden compartment bounded on the south by the substantial castellated stone boundary wall. This is now laid out with a lawn and central circular gravel area (tortoises), probably not the original layout. In the south-east corner is a small stone pavilion with a pitched roof and arched entrance set into the boundary wall. To the east is a side entrance, with castellated piers.

At the east end of the reptile house is a fine gateway with square stone piers topped by large stone balls. The path running northwards from here is an original axis of the garden. It descends via two flights of stone steps to the northern end of the formal garden. To its west is a rockery area, with informal paths through pine woodland, created in the 1930s. To its east are a series of terraces on a north-south axis. At the southern end is a small terrace (monkeys) backed by a stone wall. Central stone steps flanked by clipped hollies lead down to the main terrace, which was originally laid out with lawn tennis courts. This is rectangular, now a lawn with gravel perimeter and central east-west paths. At the west end of the central path stone steps lead up to the main north-south axial path. The terrace is built up over the slope, with a high revetment wall, projecting up as a low parapet wall, along the east side. In the middle of this side is an apsidal projection (below which is the bear pit). At the north end stone steps flanked by clipped hollies lead to a small slightly higher terrace, the sundial garden. This is a rectangular garden surrounded by a low wall, and laid out with flagstone paths in a diamond within a square pattern. It is surrounded by clipped golden box hedges, and the flowerbeds contain golden-flowered bedding plants. In the middle is a faceted baluster sundial. To the north is an area of pine trees.

The rockery garden to the west is extensive, built on a small knoll and its west-facing slope in the 1930s. The trees are mainly conifers, and in particular pines. A water garden, with a small artificial stream dropping through a series of pools lies near the north end. It has much limestone rockwork, with a small stone bridge near the top.

To the west of the water garden, next to the car park, is an isolated pergola of four circular stone columns on a slightly raised flagstone base, and a top of wooden beams. Beneath it is a stone seat with a back, and sculptured sides in the form of griffins. The car park, made for the zoo in the 1960s, replaced an extension of the drive, an area of pines, and a field.

At the north end of the car park, to the north-west of the pergola, a curving flagstone path leads south-westwards to a sunken oval feature, originally a bowling green (now sea lions). In a small triangular lawn to the south of the path is a well, an original feature of the gardens. It has a circular stone surround standing on an octagonal stone base, with an iron superstructure. A stone in the grass is inscribed 'Ye Olde Wishing Well/Rest awhile and wish awhile'. The path leads to fine stone steps flanked by parapet walls topped by three stone balls (one missing at the top), which descend to the former bowling green, now a shallow concrete-lined pool for the sea lions. Just to the north is a small Gorsedd circle on a knoll, erected in 1909, from which there are panoramic views to the west and north. This is also an original feature, installed by Walter Whitehead. The high ground to the north, from which there are very fine views, is now occupied by zoo buildings. Below the sea lion pool is a smaller pool, now the flamingo pool. Originally there was a swimming pool here.

The informal woodland occupies the eastern half of the garden, on ground sloping steeply to the north-east. The woodland is mixed deciduous and coniferous, with some tall pines, and much of it is undisturbed by zoo installations. There are a number of original winding paths through the area, access to which is off the two drives. (Some of the nature trail paths were made by the zoo.) One path leads from the southern end of the main terrace into the woodland below.

Sources

Secondary

Mawson, T.H., The Art and Craft of Garden Making (1907, 3rd edition), pp. 120, 129.

Hubbard, E., Clwyd (1986), p. 141.

Ottewill, D., The Edwardian Garden (1989), p. 171.

The Welsh Mountain Zoo (Guidebook).