

CAER RHUN HALL**Ref No** PGW (Gd) 12 (CON)**OS Map** 115**Grid Ref** SH 774 705**Former County** Gwynedd**Unitary Authority** Conwy**Community Council** Caerhun**Designations** Listed building: house Grade II; SSSI on eastern edge of park (river flats) where rare Marsh Pea grows.**Site Evaluation** **Grade II****Primary reasons for grading** Well preserved garden layout of the 1890s set in extensive older parkland, in attractive position beside the River Conwy.**Type of Site** Terraced formal gardens, large park, remains of walled garden.**Main Phases of Construction** 1890s, park earlier in nineteenth century or before**SITE DESCRIPTION**

Caer Rhun Hall is situated just to the east of the B5106 Conwy to Betws y Coed road, about 7 km south of Conway. The house, although close to the road, is surrounded by gardens, and faces south over its wide, shallow terraces. The River Conwy is about 0.75 km away to the east. The home farm and walled kitchen garden lie on the other side of the B5106, immediately opposite the house.

The house, now used as an accountancy college, is a large, three-storey late Victorian mansion in a style showing Elizabethan influence, built of roughly-dressed, coursed pale grey limestone with red sandstone window surrounds and chimneys. It has crow-stepped gables over the bays and some windows, and a slate roof. The roofline is heavily ornamented, having, as well as the decorative gables and many tall chimneys, thin columnar finials topped with stone balls. There are also towers on the south-east corner and in the north-east angle. The large windows are mullioned and transomed, with leaded lights. It was built by General Hugh Gough in 1892 on the site of Plas Caerhun, a seventeenth-century house which may have had medieval origins.

The house itself seems to have been little altered externally and probably looks almost exactly as it did when new. Alterations to the outbuildings and the new college buildings are hidden by

garden walls, and apart from minor changes to the gardens the appearance and layout of the last decade of the nineteenth century is remarkably well preserved.

The Davies family, who owned the Caerhun estate in the seventeenth century, were descended from Sir Gruffydd Llwyd, lord of Dinorwig and Tregarnedd. The estate seems to have remained in the same family until late in the nineteenth century, although it was inherited several times by a female, which resulted in some name changes.

The first time this happened, in the early eighteenth century, Hugh Jones, husband of Grace Davies, changed his name to Jones Davies. In the next generation, their son left the estate to his sister, who was married to a Ralph Griffith. The family name then became Davies Griffith. When Edmund Hyde Hall toured Caernarfonshire in about 1810, Hugh Davies Griffith, the owner, was a minor; he must have been the grandson of the above couple. Later in the nineteenth century Catherine Hester Davies Griffith, who married Richard Hemming, inherited the estate, and as her children were all girls except the first, who died without issue, it is probable that it was the marriage of the eldest surviving daughter which brought the estate to General Gough. Catherine Hester was, however, still alive in 1892 when the new house was built, though she died the following year; this may suggest that the estate had already been sold.

General Gough was a distinguished military man, having been Colonel of the Royal Horse Guards, Colonel-in-Chief of the 60th Rifles, Commander-in-Chief in India during the Sikh wars, and also Governor of Jersey. He sold the house to Dr G H B Kenrick, a barrister who also had Indian connections, having been on the Viceroy's council. With the house came General Gough's military portraits, for which there was no room in his new, smaller home. The house and gardens have been in the hands of the present owners since 1953.

Oddly, Caer Rhun house does not appear to be shown at all on the Ordnance Survey 2-in. manuscript map made in about 1820, though there certainly must have been a house at that time; but its relatively recent history is very well documented by the 25-in. Ordnance Survey maps of 1889 and 1913.

The stable block, dating from about the same time as the house, consists of two ranges joined at right-angles, each with a short return at the end, though both of these have been rebuilt (the return on the north range has been replaced by a shed). Through the eastern range is an archway, linking the yards to the west (reached from the road) and east (reached from the courtyard by the house). The buildings are of stone with slate roofs, and crow-stepped gables, like the house; the east range is single-storey and the north range two-storey, incorporating accommodation for grooms and coachman. The stable buildings have been much altered and new college buildings have been added in the eastern yard, and a telephone box under the arch. Both yards are tarmac-surfaced, but under the archway the old cobbled surface remains.

The existing stable block replaces an earlier one which, according to the 1889 map, was built as a long, curving range to the north and west of the old house. There were still two yards, one to the north (with a curving north wall which still stands) and one to the south-west, now partly

under the new stable block.

South of the stables there were, in addition to the glasshouses, two short ranges of buildings facing each other. One was along the west end of the glasshouses and the other against the road wall. The latter, which is stone-built but now has a corrugated roof, survives. Various new buildings have been added.

The gardener's house, a fairly substantial building, is situated to the south-west of the Hall, quite close to the road wall. It has survived from before the rebuilding of the main house, as it appears on the 1889 map, identical in plan and in the same position. It also lacks the crow-stepped gables typical of the 1890s buildings. Originally the kitchen garden lay immediately to the south-east, but after this was moved to the other side of the road the glasshouses remained close to the gardener's house, immediately to the north. The house is built of roughly-dressed grey stone, similar to that of the main house and probably from the same source. It has recently been re-pointed and has a new slate roof and modern windows, but with sandstone sills and lintels. It is a good-sized, two-storey house, L-shaped, with a porch on the west.

The gardens are surrounded by the once very extensive park, which runs down to the river on the east and also extends some way to the north and south, on both sides of the B5106. It includes the small church of St Mary and the Roman fort of Canovium within which the church and churchyard lie. Although most of the park is now in separate ownership and is mostly regularly ploughed, sufficient of the dot-planted trees survive for it to retain its parkland appearance, though this will not persist for many more years as many of the trees are nearing the ends of their lives, and they are not being replaced.

The park pre-dates the present house and its layout was largely unchanged when the house was rebuilt and the garden redesigned in 1892. In its present form it is likely to date to the early nineteenth century. The 1889 Ordnance Survey map records the layout of the grounds as they were before the house was rebuilt and by comparing it with the 1913 map it is possible to see how comprehensive was the redesigning of the whole garden area. The park, however, was not much altered, except that the garden was extended slightly on the north and west, taking the drive into the garden and necessitating the re-routing of a footpath to the church. The new home farm and walled garden were constructed in one of the park enclosures, on the west side of the B5106.

The one small area of the park which is still in the same ownership as the house is an enclosure to the south of the garden, running down to the belt of trees along the lane to the church. This is kept mowed and is used as a small 5-hole golf course, without landscaping. Some specimen trees remain.

The rest of the park is in different hands and is farmed, much of it being regularly ploughed and many of the trees shown on the old maps having gone. So far, however, it retains its parkland appearance, sloping gently towards the river, dotted with old oaks.

The drive originally left the road in the same place as it now does, but skirted the north and

north-west side of the garden and entered by a gate from the park to the east of the house. The east was evidently the entrance front of the pre-1892 house. After the new house was built, with the main entrance on the north side, the garden was extended over the old route of the drive, and a new drive was constructed within the garden.

The lane to the church runs just south of the garden and cuts diagonally across the Roman fort, within which the church lies, continuing beyond as an unsurfaced track. Two public roads, the B5106 and the minor road to Roewen which turns off it opposite the drive entrance, also cut through the park. There are several footpaths within the eastern part of the park, between the garden and the river.

The parkland trees, which are mostly deciduous, were already present in 1889, as were the two areas of woodland to the north and south. Both these areas seem to have consisted entirely of deciduous trees both then and later. However, after 1889 and before 1913, no doubt around the same time as all the other changes were made, some mixed plantations were laid out in strips along the eastern side of the B5106 and the northern side of the lane to the church, presumably to increase privacy. An area of probably natural woodland in the valley of the small stream to the west of the new farm and walled garden was increased in extent and had conifers added to it, and belts of conifers were planted along the roadsides and in the field to the west, surrounding the walled garden. Only parts of these now survive, and many self-sown deciduous trees have appeared.

The ha-ha forms the southern boundary of the garden, and may date from before the 1890s redesign, as the boundary on the 1889 map follows exactly the same curving line for most of its length, though there is no indication of a ditch. The ha-ha consists of a dry-stone wall about 1.5 m high, with a sharp ditch on the outside.

An ice-house is located in the northern part of the park, on the edge of a plantation north-east of the house, under a man-made mound. It is approached via a right-angled passage 6 m long which had at least two doors. The chamber is conical and domed.

In the southern part of the park is the Roman fort of Canovium. The fort is still plainly visible as a bank, some parts of which have been more ploughed over than others. Within it is the small church of St Mary, whose stone-walled graveyard occupies most of the north-east quadrant of the fort; Roman masonry is visible in the church walls.

The lane leading to the church is now a public road, but in the nineteenth century the church was only accessible on foot from this direction. The entrance to the lane was gated, and the iron gate remains, hung on rebuilt stone pillars. Near the site of the Roman quay, east of the house, which is associated with the Roman fort, is a boat house, now ruined and overgrown, which probably at one time utilised the quay. This is shown on the 1889 map.

The gardens, of about 10 acres, now preserve, with minor alterations, the layout of about 1892-97, contemporary with the building of the present house. The previous layout, documented in

detail by the 25-in. Ordnance Survey map of 1889, was completely swept away and the gardens comprehensively redesigned.

Before 1892 the house was slightly further to the north, with informal shrubberies and areas with trees beyond; to the south-west of it lay a 1.5 acre paddock, with a small plantation further south still; almost all of the remaining area, apart from a lawn immediately to the south of the house, was a walled kitchen garden. This had an irregular shape and layout and contained glasshouses and fruit trees (both on the wall and free-standing), and was oriented, like the house, slightly east of south.

The new layout, while retaining a broadly similar division into areas, is in detail completely different, with terraces replacing the walled garden, an orchard on the site of the paddock (now a car park), the house further south with the glasshouses to the west of it, and the informal area alongside the drive (which has moved to the other side of it) widened and extended southwards. None of the walls or garden divisions are on exactly the same line as before except for one curved yard wall to the north; the alignment is still a little east of south, but nearer due south. A completely new walled kitchen garden, smaller than the old but containing no glass, was laid out on the west side of the B5106.

At first glance it seems surprising not to have adapted the old layout rather than create a completely new one, but from the scale and design of the mansion it is clear that the builder, General Gough, was a man with grand ideas and the ability to carry them out. A formal setting was created close to the house in preference to the kitchen garden, but the General seems to have been interested in the glasshouses as he kept them near the house, constructing a special wall to support them. The new total area of glass was similar to what was cleared, and the materials may have been re-used as far as possible; the supporting wall appears to be of re-used brick, no doubt from the old garden walls. The glasshouses have now been demolished, in most cases being replaced with new buildings used by the college.

The garden was extended on north and east, taking in the former drive and a strip of the park; this allowed for more trees to be planted, but again the old route of the drive was completely abandoned and another built following a slightly different route. This quite slight extension also involved re-routing a public footpath through the park. The wider belt of trees contains many fine specimens, but reduces the view towards the river, although the latter can be attractively glimpsed between the trees.

A small formal pool and pergola at the west end of the terraces also seem likely to be the work of General Gough; a yew arbour at the opposite end may be slightly later, but provides a focal point from the pool, so was probably part of the same plan. The walk down the west side of the terraces has been laid out to focus on a pre-existing cedar, but the double border along this path is later, laid out by the present owners. The box parterre on the top terrace may be a later addition by General Gough, or possibly is attributable to a later owner, perhaps Dr Kenrick. The expansion of the small plantation in the south-west corner into a wilderness, or shrubbery

with walks, is probably contemporary with the main scheme.

The outbuildings and yards, contemporary with the house (except for the gardener's house, which is older), have been encroached upon by new developments connected with the use of the house as a college, but most of this area is out of sight from the main part of the gardens, as is the car park in the former orchard. The lodge, with its small box-edged garden, is again contemporary with the house, and retains its original appearance.

The tarmac drive approaches in a curve from the north-west. It falls entirely within the area of the gardens, as does the lodge. The lodge is single-storey with an attic, built of grey stone. There is a central door with a porch and a window either side; under each window is a small, formal, box-hedged area. These are clearly shown on the 1913 map and are no doubt contemporary with the lodge, which seems to have been rebuilt at the same time as the house. There was a lodge in the same position when the 1889 map was surveyed, but it was smaller and lacked the porch and garden areas.

The entrance gates are iron, hung on slim, stone-built battlemented piers, with a pedestrian gate to one side. The gate piers seem more recent than the wall into which they are set, and may date from the redesigning, while the wall may survive from an earlier period. The stone of the piers is the same as that of which the lodge is built.

There are two further gateways from the road into the garden. The next, a short distance south of the main entrance, is into the stable-yard, and has similar gates and posts, the latter slightly less tall. The third entrance is a modern opening in the wall and has no gate or gateposts; the wall has been rebuilt for at least a short distance either side. The entrance leads into the car park on the site of the former orchard.

Alongside the drive, on both sides but especially on the outer (north and east) side, are trees and shrubs planted in grass. Trees include some yews near the gate, some fir and hemlock and mature deciduous trees. Numerous large stumps indicate the positions of former trees. Most of the mature deciduous trees are beeches, probably pre-dating the present house. There are some much older oaks. Older shrubs include rhododendron and laurel. Near the walled courtyard at the southern end of the drive there are older yews and pines, and a cedar close to the corner of the house. Newer plantings include flowering cherries, copper beech, cypresses, skimmia, bamboo and different varieties of rhododendron, with a few exotics such as yuccas.

In front of the main entrance to the house is a square, walled, tarmac-surfaced courtyard in which the drive terminates. On the east side the wall has a partly retaining function, as the lawned area beyond it is at a higher level. All around the inside of the courtyard are narrow borders, which pre-date the current surface as their rough stone edgings are partly buried by the tarmac. The borders along the house walls are edged with large, thick tiles. There is also a border along the outside of the courtyard wall on the north side.

The three entrances to the courtyard are from the drive, from the stable-yard to the west, and

from the lawn, near the south-east corner. Near this entrance there is a seat against the wall, on the outside. The courtyard is shown on the 1913 map, and is clearly contemporary with the house and redesigned garden. It lies over an area which was previously lawn and driveway.

The terraces are to the south of the house, aligned on the garden front, and are wide and shallow, as the slope is slight. The top terrace runs along the front of the house, and has a broad gravel path with wide grass strips either side. North of this, at the eastern end, is a wide border up to the house walls; west of a brick cross-path leading from a door on to the terrace, the house facade is set a little further back, and in front of it there is a small lawn, though a narrow border along its southern edge continues the line of the main border to the east. West again, beyond the end of the house, is a box parterre. This consists of two squares with different box patterns, and although it is now overgrown it is clear that roses and other plants were grown in at least some of the spaces.

The lawn and the parterre are not original, as they are not shown on the 1913 map, which indicates two areas of shrubbery with an open space between which was probably paved or gravelled.

North of the parterre is a wall, running from the corner of the house westwards, and then curving south towards the gardener's cottage. This is not quite on the line of one of the old garden walls, but may have been rebuilt close to its original position; there are box-edged borders in front of it on the terrace side, and an archway leads through to the service yard between house and stables. On the terrace side there is an old iron arch for climbing plants over the path leading to the archway; this path is the one which divides the two box squares.

The gravel walk along the top terrace terminates on the east with a yew arbour containing a (modern) seat. This may not be an original feature, as it is not indicated on the 1913 map. Beyond, east of the terraces, a background is formed by a grassy area with specimen trees and shrubs, through which glimpses of the river may be obtained over the parkland.

The second terrace is lawned, and has no plantings other than some conifers by the steps and along the southern edge. There are no obvious signs of former beds in the grass, but the lost path running north-south across the middle, linking the steps down from the top terrace with those on to the lawn below the lower terrace, is visible as a flattened ridge. This can also be traced across the top terrace, back towards the house, meeting the new brick path. The path down the east side, where there are more steps, is harder to see, but that on the west side, which has steps only from the pergola at the top, is maintained, and is now flanked by a double border, of relatively recent origin. This path has the flat edging also present on the path across the top terrace, and there is a large cedar forming a focal point at the far end. The path shown on the 1913 map running east-west below the lower terrace is lost.

The southern edges of the terraces are short grass slopes, not walls, and the steps through the slopes are in shallow flights of four. Below the lower terrace is a large lawn, now occasionally used as a football pitch; it terminates at the ha-ha on the south. On this lawn are a few trees and

shrubs, including the cedar at the end of the path down the west side of the terraces, and another towards the south centre of the lawn. A third similar cedar is at the east end of the terraces, and these three certainly survive from before 1892. There are also two younger, bluer ones, probably *Cedrus atlantica glauca*, one on the lower lawn and one near the house.

There is a roughly triangular area off the north-west corner of the terraces, within the curve of the wall running round to the gardener's house. This is now rather overgrown, but contains a small stone-edged rectangular feature with an apse on the west side, probably originally a pool. Tumbled stone within the apse may have been around the base of a fountain. This area is slightly above the level of the top terrace and is reached up two low steps, the upper being part of the pool edging. This implies that one could stand here to look at the pool, but was not actually intended to enter the area, as the pool edging is scarcely wide enough to walk along. Plantings along the rear wall are similar to those further east, and there is a segment of raised bed, two blue cypresses by the pool and some box edging, but little else, and the area was probably lawned.

Along the southern edge of this triangle is a pergola consisting of stone-built pillars either side of a paved path. The superstructure, presumably timbers, has gone, but the pillars are joined at the base by low walls. Both this and the pool are probably original features of the post-1892 layout, as the latter is shown clearly on the 1913 map and the pergola is suggested by the fact that the path is shown as walled or fenced both sides.

The relationship between the pergola and the main path along the terrace is slightly awkward, but the pool is aligned on the gravel path and faces the yew arbour at the other end.

In the south-west corner of the garden, beyond the site of the orchard, is a small area which was shown as a rectangular plantation on the map of 1889. By 1913 it had been enlarged and given a curved outline, and had a path around within the boundary and one across the middle. More plantings had also been made, as conifers are indicated on this map, unlike the earlier one. More recent plantings have also been made.

Following the redesigning of the gardens at the end of the nineteenth century, there was already an unusual situation in that while the kitchen garden had been moved to the other side of the road, the glasshouses remained on the house side, fitted into an oddly-shaped area between the gardener's house and the stable block, some of them supported by a free-standing brick wall; there was even one against one of the yard walls. More recent alterations in connection with conversion of the house to a college have created various small areas of garden in the yards, as well as replacing the glasshouses with classrooms.

South of the wall which used to support the glasshouses is an oddly-shaped strip of garden running from the west end of the house to the road wall. This is mostly grass, with some shrubs etc.; some box near the gardener's house probably survives from an earlier period. The whole area of the yards to the west of the house is criss-crossed with paths, many of which have shrubs or borders alongside them, and grass between.

The 1890s kitchen garden lies on the west side of the B5106, north of the farm buildings, one range of which forms the south wall of the garden. Although the walls have largely survived, the interior has been completely cleared and is now used as a touring caravan park. The path layout is not shown on the 1914 map, but the present owners remember that the site was divided into six plots, was slightly terraced, and the paths were of brick. There were espaliers on wire and posts along the terraces, and some wall fruit still remains.

The walls are entirely of brick, three bricks thick and about 3 m high, with a slate coping. They look as though they may have been raised, especially along the road side. The bricks are severely weathered in places, where they are particularly exposed, and are in need of consolidating. There is also some ivy damage.

There were four arched doorways, of which three remain and the other has been enlarged to make an entrance to the field on the west. The main entrance is a modern breach, and there is also access via the farm buildings on the south side.

Two internal features remain - just south of centre a circular pool and fountain of dark brick, about 3.5 m in diameter and over 0.5 m deep, and in the apse to the north another, smaller (1.5 m), circular feature, which looks like a small pool filled in. The owners describe it as having had a glass superstructure at one time, and being quite deep with smooth sides and a curved bottom. They have filled it in for safety. Near this are three larch trees, looking rather out of place. Apart from the wall fruit, there are no other plants other than grass.

An orchard seems to have been created during the late nineteenth-century alterations out of part of a small field or paddock to the south of the house, alongside the road. Recently it has been cleared and gravelled. It would have been a large orchard of nearly three-quarters of an acre. No trees remain, but the orchard convention is used on the 1913 25-in. map, and the current 1:10,000 sheet. Clearance has been fairly recent, to provide a large new car park, as other parking areas are somewhat limited. The entrance from the road, near the south-west corner, has been recently made, and the road wall recently built or rebuilt - there is breeze-block on the inside, although the outside is stone, and similar in style to the rest of the road wall, but lower.

There are also new buildings towards the north-east corner of the area, and some modern rose beds near these. *Cupressus leylandii* has been extensively planted for screening and shade, but a row of limes on the road side has survived. The orchard was either walled or fenced, and if walled, the east wall may well survive, but if so is screened by trees.

Sources

Primary

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2-in. manuscript map for Ordnance Survey 1-in. 1st edition, c. 1820

Secondary

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