

SUMMARY

Ref number	PGW (Gd) 63 (CON)
OS Map	116
Grid ref	SH 813 588
Former county	Gwynedd
Local authority	Conwy
Community Council	Bro Garmon
Designations	Listed buildings: Hendre House (Grade II); Coach house (Grade II); Stable block (Grade II); Agricultural range (Grade II).
Site Evaluation	Grade II
Primary reasons for grading	Hendre House, its outbuildings, garden and park, form an attractive and relatively rare period piece of the early nineteenth century. This is a well-preserved, small country estate, in a beautiful setting, with all its original components intact. Of great interest is the older walled garden, within the park, which was originally the garden of the neighbouring house, Plas Tirion.
Type of site	Small formal and informal garden; small landscape park; walled garden.
Main phases of construction	Sixteenth/seventeenth century; about 1815; 1820s; 1900s.

Site description

Hendre House is a compact, elegant, Regency country mansion, situated on a west-facing slope on the east flank of the Conwy valley. Its situation is a very attractive one, with far-ranging views of the Conwy valley from the west and north fronts of the house. The drive approaches the house through the garden from the south, running up to a small gravel forecourt on the west front. The house is two-storey and of rubble-stone construction. It has a hipped slate roof with sandstone parapets, two main chimneys and sash windows, and it was formerly stuccoed. The main entrance, in the centre of the west front, has a simple, Classical porch with a flat roof supported on two unfluted Tuscan columns. A flight of three stone steps beneath it leads up to the front door. The north front of the house has a bow-fronted bay at its west end and a much later rectangular protruding bay at its east end. The service quarters are at the east end of the house, with a path and back door giving access directly to them.

Hendre House was built on a virgin site in about 1810 by William Edwards, high sheriff of Denbighshire in 1812. Shortly afterwards it was taken over by the Blackwall family. The architect is not known, but the design is not dissimilar to plate 80 ('Design for a Villa') in W. F. Pollock's *Modern Furnishings for Rooms* (1811). The house was drawn in the 1850s by I. Shaw for an engraving entitled 'Hendre House, Denbighshire. The Seat of Thomas Blackwall, Esqr'. A plain extension was added at the east end of the house in the later nineteenth century. This is shown on the 1880s First Edition 25in Ordnance Survey map. The house remained in the occupation of the Blackwall family until the 1930s, when it was sold to a local butcher. Its abandonment led to gradual decline and when the present owner bought it in 1999 the house was derelict and suffering from major structural defects. It is presently undergoing an extensive programme of restoration.

The outbuildings lie a short distance to the east of the house, aligned north-west/south-east along the foot of the steep slope to the east. A short back drive, flanked by rubble-stone walls, branches off the main drive to the south of the buildings and runs northwards down the slope to a yard in front of them. The yard is bounded on the

north side by a stone wall about 1.1m high, with some original stone coping and some concrete.

There are two main buildings: the coach house and stables, and the cowshed. The coach house and stables is the larger and lies to the north of the cowshed. Both are of rubble-stone construction, originally stuccoed, with hipped slate roofs. The coach house and stables building has a central two-storey coach house block flanked by single-storey stable wings. Originally the stables contained six stalls: three in the room to the north of the carriage room and three, which remain, in the corresponding room to the south. The main, arched entrance is in the centre, with a diocletian window above the carriage doors. The lower, two-storey cowshed has three doors, an arched entrance at the south end and wooden slatted windows. It provided accommodation for ten cows. Tucked into the slope to the north of the coach house and stables is a small, single-storey, rubble-stone outside lavatory, or *tŷ bach*, with a pitched slate roof. Below are the ruinous, rubble-stone remains of some pigsties, with divisions of large slate slabs; the south wall of the sties has recently collapsed.

The yard is bounded on the west side by a rubble-stone wall about 1–1.5m high, in which are two entrances to the garden. That to the north is a pedestrian entrance, with an iron gate; that to the south was originally similar, but has been widened in recent years to allow access for vehicles. At the foot of the wall are stone troughs in which coach wheels were washed, with adjoining slate-lined hard standing.

To the south of the stable block and drive, on the same alignment as the other buildings, is a rubble-stone barn with an open west end, supported on square, stone piers, and pitched slate roof. The covered part of the barn remains unaltered, with its slate threshing floor divided from the remainder by vertical slate slabs. Attached to its north side is a small, single-storey, cart-shed extension of similar construction, with brick pens in front of it. These were once used as pigsties. To the south is a small stone pen and shed with a pent roof.

The outbuildings are contemporary with the house and all are shown on the 1880s First Edition 25in Ordnance Survey map.

The park of Hendre House is about 60 acres in extent. It lies on the west side of the Conwy valley, and the ground slopes generally down towards the valley floor. The east side of the park is the steepest, and the house lies at the foot of this steeper part. The ground falls away from the house and garden, to the north and west, giving fine views out over the parkland to the valley beyond.

The park is an inverted L-shape, bounded on the east by the B5427 road from Llanrwst to Nebo and on the remaining sides by field boundaries. A watercourse runs westwards along the north boundary, and in the north-west corner, where the walled garden is situated, an ancient track leads north-westwards beyond the park to an iron gate, flanked by stone walls, which in turn leads to a track running westwards to Plas Tirion. This is the old access to the walled garden.

The entrance to the park is in the north-east corner, where the drive leads off the Llanrwst to Nebo road at an acute angle. Iron piers flank a simple iron gateway. There is now no lodge at the entrance, but one originally stood in the angle between the road and the drive; scattered stonework indicates its position. The stone-surfaced drive runs more or less straight southwards along the contour of the steep slope, down the wooded east side of the park. The woodland is of beech and oak, with a few conifers at the south end of the drive, nearer the house. The drive is built out over the slope and supported on a rubble-stone wall. It is flanked on its upper side by a low rubble-stone revetment wall and on its lower side, by simple iron park fencing. At its south end the drive curves round to the west and is flanked by rubble-stone walls. The outer one is about 2m high, with a cock-and-hen top and an alcove for a water tank. An iron pedestrian

gate in the wall leads to the park and barn to the south. The inner wall is about 1.5m high, with an uneven top. The entrance to the garden, south-east of the house, has a slate pier, about 1.7m high, on its north side, attached to which is an iron gate. The similar south pier lies on the ground and the flanking wall is broken down here.

The majority of the park, apart from the woodland along the east side, is open, unfenced, rolling grassland with scattered trees. Many of the trees are oaks and there is a particularly large one south of the garden. A steeper, west-facing slope south of the house is planted mostly with oaks and Scots pines. An old, grass-covered track can be traced running north-south to the west of the garden to the park's south boundary. The northern end of the park is more open, with a strip of gorse below the woodland, and a small pond, with a ruinous stone dam on its west side, on the west boundary. A narrow track, with a low drystone revetment wall on its upper side, runs north-south through the lower part of the woodland. Its northern section, now difficult to follow, ran to the drive near the entrance. At its south end, where it is overgrown, it leads to the stable yard.

The park is contemporary with the house, laid out by William Edwards soon after 1810 as an attractive, ornamental setting for his new home. In character it is simple and understated, but the planting enhances the beauty of the scenery and the resulting park provides very attractive views, both outwards from the house and garden and inwards from the Conwy valley floor. The layout and planting is shown on the 1880s First Edition 25in Ordnance Survey map, which indicates that, apart from some trees having gone from the southern part of the park, very little has changed since that date. A path leading off that running through the woodland north of the house to the walled garden and another from a gate in the garden boundary to the track to its south-west can no longer be traced, but all other features remain.

The garden is roughly oval in shape and lies mainly to the north, south and west of the house. To the south and west its character is informal; to the north it is formal. It occupies a platform of more or less level ground around the house, below which, to the north and west, the ground falls steeply. It is bounded by simple iron fencing except on the east side, next to the stable yard, where it is bounded by a rubble-stone wall. Set into this wall, on the garden side, is a round-arched alcove. It contains a water basin of hollowed-out slate.

The drive enters the garden in the south-east corner and curves round to the north, passing a small shrubbery on the east and a more open area of grass on the west, with mature trees and shrubs in a broad belt along the garden boundary. The drive leads to a gravel forecourt in front of the west side of the house. From here there is a fine view out across the park to the Conwy valley, flanked by beech and bay trees. The ground drops steeply below it, with some yew trees on the slope. A path leads through the trees, to the south-west of the house, to a simple iron pedestrian gate, flanked by iron posts, in the boundary fence. Two slate steps lead out into the park.

The shrubbery, to the south of the house, lies on a low mounded ridge and is now overgrown and very dense. Laurel has become dominant, but there are also other trees and shrubs within it, including yew, sycamore, cherry, cotoneaster and philadelphus. In the north corner is a small rectangular building with no roof, a slate floor and an entrance on the north side. Its walls stand to about 1.7m and have thick slate coping, indicating that it was probably never roofed. In its south-west corner the coping crosses the corner and the slope above the building is revetted with drystone walling. This is an enigmatic building, the purpose of which was almost certainly utilitarian. Its present use for the storage of leaves and grass cuttings suggests a possible original use. Next to it, on its east side, is a short, walled passageway.

To the north of the house are two grass terraces, facing northwards, from which there is a spectacular view of the park and Conwy valley beyond. The upper terrace, on the same level as the house, is about 3m wide. It is bounded by a steep grass bank about 1m high. In the centre is a flight of eight slate steps. These are flanked by low brick parapet walls with flat slate coping, terminated by brick piers with slate tops. The main terrace, below, was originally a tennis lawn. It is flanked on its west side by large oak, lime and horse chestnut trees, with more trees, including a large sweet chestnut, on the steep slope below. The north and west sides of the terrace are bounded by mortared stone revetment walls, with cut-slate coping at ground level. Iron posts for the piers of a hooped pergola that ran along part of the top of the wall were originally fixed into this. Most of the pergola has fallen, but a few uprights remain in place. The west side is about 1.7m high; the north-west corner is rounded and the north side is about 2.5m high, lessening in height towards the east end. From the centre of the north side of the terrace a flight of slate steps, with brick risers, leads down from the terrace to an informally planted slope extending to the north boundary of the garden. The steps are flanked by low brick parapet walls topped with slate coping. The brick and slate piers that terminated them have fallen. To the north-west of the terrace is a row of large golden yews and to the north-east is a large fir tree. At the foot of the north wall, east of the steps, is a slate bench facing the view to the north. Its seat and back are single slate slabs; its simple arms are now slightly ruinous.

To the north and east of the house the garden is bounded on the east side by a belt of yew and laurel. An iron pedestrian gate on the boundary east of the house leads to a slate path, flanked by upright slate slabs, to the service quarters.

The garden is contemporary with the rest of the development of the site soon after 1810 by William Edwards. The 1880s Ordnance Survey map shows that initially it was entirely informal. The drive followed its present course but then continued from the forecourt around the north side of the house, perhaps as a gravel path rather than a drive. The shrubbery is shown planted with mixed deciduous and coniferous trees. The west boundary is densely planted and the north side of the garden is informal, with a few mixed trees, and only extends roughly as far as the main terrace does today. The engraving dating to the 1850s shows this earlier arrangement, with a few trees and shrubs flanking the drive and forecourt. In the late nineteenth or early twentieth century the north side of the garden was extended northwards as far as the track that used to run around the garden and the terraces were made. After the house was abandoned in the 1930s no further alterations were made; the only major change was the decay and collapse of the iron pergola along the edge of part of the tennis lawn. The garden entered a long period of decay and neglect from which it is now being rescued.

The walled garden lies in the north-west corner of the park, on ground sloping gently down to the north-west. A stream, flanked by pine trees, runs westwards along the outside of its north wall, and a track runs between its west wall and the park boundary. This leads north-westwards beyond the park to an iron gate leading to a track to Plas Tirion, to the west.

The garden is an irregular, four-sided area, enclosed by drystone rubble walls with flat stone coping. It has a north side, an east side, a short south side and a long south-west side. The walls stand for the most part to their full height. The corners are built of substantial quoin stones. There are various holes in the walls, particularly where trees have fallen on them; on the south side there is one broken section, and on the west side, two. The south-west side is about 1.8–2.2m high. At the north-west acute-angled corner there are traces

of lime on the stonework. The wall rises to about 3m high here and continues at this height along the north side. There are three holes in this wall and near the west end is a blocked doorway. The east wall is lower — about 2.2m high — and is broken down in three places towards the north end. Near the south-east corner is a small entrance gap with a slate sill. Inside, to the south, is a small, single-storey building against the wall. It is divided into three; the east room has a fireplace. The south wall is 2.5–3m high and is crumbling in places. Where it forms the back wall of the building there is a low, blocked opening, with a large lintel stone over it. Just west of the building is a blocked doorway.

The interior of the garden is disused and overgrown with seedling trees. The only remains of historic significance, above ground, are some coppiced hazel, perhaps indicating a Victorian nuttery, and some overgrown box bushes.

The walled garden is of great historic interest in that it was originally the garden of Plas Tirion, a large, late sixteenth-century house about 200m to the west. Plas Tirion was built for a junior branch of the Wynn family of nearby Gwydir. The house was improved in 1626–28 for Robert Wynn (d. 1640), who was high sheriff of Denbighshire in 1618. Richard Wynn, later Sir Richard, was living here in 1656–59 and was high sheriff of Caernarvonshire in 1658. There are three letters written to him at Plas Tirion, dating to 1656/57, 1657 and 1658, in the National Library of Wales. The house contains fine seventeenth-century plasterwork. It is probable that the walled garden is either contemporary with the building of the house in the late sixteenth century or dates to the early or mid-seventeenth century, when prominent members of the Wynn family were living here. As such it is a rare survival of an early walled garden and may contain archaeological remains of great interest.

The land that William Edwards bought in about 1810, in order to make a park for Hendre House, included Plas Tirion's walled garden, which presumably was by that time disused. It then became the kitchen garden of Hendre House, with a path to it from the service yard. The 1880s First Edition 25in Ordnance Survey map shows the garden simply laid out with a path along the north and east sides, the building in the south-east corner and a central path running north-westwards across the garden from its west end. Rows of trees, perhaps the nuttery, occupied the western half of the garden and lined the paths. There was also a path along the outside of the north and east walls. None of the paths survive. The garden has been disused since at least the 1930s, when the house was abandoned.

Sources

Primary

Information from Mr M. Tree

Tithe map, 1839: Caernarfon Record Office.

'Hendre House, Denbighshire. The seat of Thomas Blackwall, Esqr'.

Drawing by I. Shaw, engraved by C. J. Greenwood: private collection.

Secondary

J. Ballinger (ed.), *Calendar of the Wynn Papers, 1515–1690* (1926), 347–49.

W. Bezant Lowe, *The Heart of Northern Wales*, vol. 2 (1927), 302–05, figs 161, 162.

E. Hubbard, *The Buildings of Wales: Clwyd* (1986), 238.

W. F. Pollock, *Modern Furnishings for Rooms* (1811), plates 79, 80.

P. Smith, *Houses of the Welsh Countryside* (1988), maps 27, 48a.