

**CADW/ICOMOS REGISTER OF PARKS AND GARDENS
OF SPECIAL HISTORIC INTEREST IN WALES**

SITE DOSSIER

SITE NAME The Argoed

REF. NO. PGW (Gt) 49

OS MAP 162 GRID REF. SO 523084

Former COUNTY Gwent Unitary Authority Monmouth B.C. COMMUNITY
COUNCIL Trellech United

DESIGNATIONS Listed building: Grade

National Park AONB SSSI NNR ESA GAM SAM CA

SITE EVALUATION Grade II

Primary reasons for grading

Gardens in magnificent position overlooking the Wye valley, owned in the 1860s by Richard Potter, father of Beatrice Webb. Associations with the early Fabians and George Bernard Shaw.

TYPE OF SITE

Informal gardens of lawns, woodland and shrubberies, and walled garden.

MAIN PHASES OF CONSTRUCTION

17th century; late 19th century

VISITED BY/DATE Elisabeth Whittle/February 1992

HOUSE

Name The Argoed

Grid ref SO 523084

Date/style 16th-19th century/

Brief description:

The Argoed is a large rambling stone house with a slate roof, situated near the top of the west side of the Wye valley. From the east front of the house there are magnificent views out over the Wye valley. The forecourt is on the west side, originally approached by two drives, one from the north and one from the west. Access to the north drive (now in separate ownership) is now blocked.

There was a house here, belonging to the Probert family, in the 16th century, and the oldest part of the present house, in the centre, was built by Christopher Probert at the end of the 16th century. The house was then rebuilt by Sir George Probert (1617-77) in the first half of the 17th century. Until about 1800 The Argoed was the main residence of the Proberts and their descendants the Morgans. Between 1800 and about 1865 it was let as a farmhouse. In about 1865 it was bought, together with a number of surrounding farms, by Richard Potter, chairman of the Great Western Railway, who greatly altered and extended the house, to the north and south. The old house, although altered, is still visible in the centre of the house, with a large porch decorated with strapwork over it on the east front. The Victorian extension to the south is 3-storey, with a porch on the south side over which is a worn crest of the Probert family, and above which is a sundial with the same crest.

One of Richard Potter's nine daughters, Beatrice, became famous as a founder of the Fabians, and brought many of her friends here to relax, write and bicycle around the countryside. George Bernard Shaw was one of the visitors, wrote here, and much admired the situation. Richard Potter died in 1892, when the house was put up for sale, and eventually bought in 1897 by Mr K. Chatfield.

OUTBUILDINGS

Name Stables and coach house

Grid ref SO 523084

Date/style, and brief description

At right-angles to the house, at the north end of the forecourt, is a rectangular stone building, known as the 'Great Stables'. The entrance is at the west end, where there is also a small arched window with a moulded stone surround. Along the south side are three stone mullioned windows and one larger opening, with wooden slatted shutters, near the east end. The pitched roof has terracotta tiles on its upper part and stone tiles near the eaves, and at the east end is a small belfry. Inside, the floor is cobbled with a central drain, and ranged along the north side are well preserved wooden stalls.

To the north of the house is the former coach house, which is a two-storey stone building with a central archway. It is now a separate property and has been converted into a private house.

THE PLEASURE GARDEN

Grid ref SO 523084

Date/style 17th and 19th century/walled; informal

GENERAL DESCRIPTION, HISTORY AND LAYOUT

The gardens of The Argoed occupy a roughly triangular area near the top of the steep west side of the Wye valley, just south of the village of Penallt. They are bounded on the west by two minor roads and on the east by a wall and fencing to the north and south of the house and by a ha-ha to the east of it, allowing magnificent views of the Wye valley from the house and garden. The house lies on the eastern side of the gardens, with a rectangular gravel forecourt on its west side. A straight gravel drive flanked by pairs of ancient sycamore trees leads from the south end to the road to Tre-gagle. A stone wall now divides the two properties at the north end of the forecourt, where the other drive originally led out past the coach house and along the north-east boundary of the garden, flanked by a row of wellingtonias, to an entrance with a small lodge at Penallt. This drive is now disused, and the owner of the Coach House has built a new drive in from the west.

Most of the gardens are laid out informally, with specimen trees, shrubberies, and lawns. Immediately around the house there is more formality, with wide gravel paths and two large grass terraces to the east of the house. These are separated by a low scarp, and the lower is bounded by a curving ha-ha, which gives views out over the Wye valley. In the field below the ha-ha are traces of at least one further terrace below the other two. To the north of the terraces is a large rectangular walled garden, with roughly coursed stone walls, and arched doorways on the south and east sides. It is thought that this and the terraces east of the house are probably 17th-century in date. In the south-east corner is a small raised stone pavilion which appears contemporary with the walls into which it is built. It has a pitched stone slate roof, and steps up to it on the outer side of the south wall. Two windows with circular stone mullions decorated with geometric patterns in low relief look west and north. Beneath the west window is a low relief panel decorated with two dragons facing each other. In the north-east corner of the walled garden an iron armillary sphere stands on a tall stone squared pillar of the same stone and construction as the walls and pavilion, with which it may be contemporary.

To the south of the house is a small paved area with an open rustic loggia at the south end, called the 'Italian garden'. A narrow channel runs down the middle, with three circular millstones set into it at intervals, and a raised millstone at the south end. To the west of the Coach House is a small roughly circular pond, with a stone revetted dam along its east side.

The garden is planted with a belt of mixed coniferous and deciduous woodland along its western boundary, with an underplanting of specimen shrubs, including some unusual rhododendrons. The rest of the area to the west of the house is grassed, with specimen conifers (northern half) and deciduous trees, and evergreen shrubs, including rhododendrons, flanking the east end of the south drive.

The earliest parts of the garden probably date from the time of Sir George Probert, when the house was rebuilt in the first half of the 17th century. Probable 17th-century features include the terraces to the east of the house, and the walled garden and garden pavilion. The sycamores flanking the south drive are very ancient (some possibly 17th-century), and one is the second largest sycamore in girth in the country. The present-day appearance of the gardens is largely due to the late 19th-century alterations carried out by the Potter family, although the ha-ha may be earlier. Much of the tree planting, including the row of wellingtonias along the north drive, and some of the shrub planting, dates from this period.

STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

Drives and forecourt

There are three drives to the house. The former main drive enters the grounds at their north corner, and runs straight along the north-east boundary of the gardens to the west side of the Coach House. Formerly it continued to the forecourt. It was made in the 1860s, is gravelled, and is now disused.

A more recent drive leads from the road along the west boundary to the Coach House.

A third gravel drive leads from the road to Tre-gagle to the southern end of the forecourt. It runs straight for most of its length, only turning northwards near the entrance.

The forecourt is situated to the west of the house. It is rectangular, and on slightly sloping ground above the level of the house. At its southern end is an area of original uneven stone surface, with a diagonal stone drain across it. A gravel path leads round the south end of the house to the lawn and terraces to the east. To the west of the forecourt a former path is visible beneath the turf, running north-south from an iron gate into the field at the south end to an iron gate into the court in front of the Coach House at the north end (no longer accessible from the south).

Terraces and ha-ha

To the east of the house are a series of grassed terraces, two of which remain in the present-day garden. The upper terrace runs along the east front of the house, has a wide gravel path along it, and is bounded by a grass scarp c. 1.5 m. high down to the second, wider terrace, which is bounded by a curving ha-ha. This bounds the garden on its east side, and consists of a well preserved dry-stone wall and outer ditch. In the field beyond a further rectangular terrace is visible below the others, bounded by a slight scarp (more pronounced on the south side).

Pond

To the west of the Coach House, in the northern sector of the garden, is a small, roughly circular pond, with a straight stone revetted dam along its east side.

BUILT COMPONENTS

The walled garden and pavilion

To the north of the terraces lies a large walled garden, with dry-stone, roughly coursed stone walls c. 2 m. high, topped with stone slates. There are arched doorways in the east and south sides. It is thought that this garden is probably 17th-century in date.

In the south-east corner a small raised stone pavilion is built into the garden walls, and is of the same masonry. It appears contemporary with the walled garden. Stone steps up the outside of the south wall of the garden lead to its small wooden doorway, under which are two rounded arches. The pitched roof is stone slated. There are two windows, on the west and north sides, with circular stone mullions carved in low relief with geometrical patterns. Below the west window is a narrow panel carved in low relief with two dragons facing each other. To the south of the pavilion is a short stretch of stone walling with a doorway in it, and steps leading down to the meadow below.

The 'Italian garden'

To the south of the drive, south of the house, is a small rectangular paved area backed at the south end by a dry-stone wall and open rustic loggia. Down the centre is a narrow runnel, interrupted by three millstones. At the south end is a raised millstone. A low parapet wall runs along the north half of the west side and part of the east side. The loggia has wooden supports and a sloping terracotta-tiled roof. On

its east side is a small window. The wall along the south side continues a little way to the west, and appears originally to have been part of a building, with remnants of windows (blocked).

The forecourt is bounded by a low dry-stone wall along its west side, with piers and ball finials flanking an entrance in to the garden and the entrance of the drive. To the north of the forecourt a high stone wall blocks off the Coach House court and other outbuildings. In it is a blocked arched window. At its west end is an iron gate (at the north end of the former path, see above), then the wall continues westwards in stepped sections, at a lower height for a short distance across the garden.

The garden is bounded on the south side by iron fencing. Along the road, flanking the south entrance, is a stretch of rough dry-stone walling c. 1.5 m. high. In line with the straight section of the south drive is a narrow gateway (modern gate), flanked by round pillars with concrete tops. To the north is the present-day entrance, flanked by square stone piers topped by large ball finials. The stone walling stops just north of this entrance, and is replaced by modern fencing. The north-east side of the garden is partly bounded by a low dry-stone wall.

ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENTS

In the north-east corner of the walled garden is an iron armillary sphere on a tall squared stone plinth, built in the same style and of the same stone as the garden walls and pavilions. It is therefore thought to be contemporary with them.

In front of the south door of the house the path is flanked by two rectangular plinths with small stone vases on top.

In the 'Italian Garden' are three millstones set into the stone paving, and a further millstone raised on a plinth at the south end. The statues in the garden are modern.

In the south-east corner of the gravel area to the south of the house is a large millstone raised on stones, with a stone pillar in the centre, on top of which is a painted statue (modern).

On either side of the drive, near the forecourt, are circular stepped stones (? millstones) topped with painted vases (modern). The small gateway in the forecourt wall is flanked by square piers topped by small stone vases. The step in the gateway is a small millstone.

On the eastern edge of the belt of woodland and shrubs along the west side of the garden, in the southern half, is a stone cross base (3 square steps and a rectangular plinth on top).

PLANTED COMPONENTS

The garden is largely laid out to lawns and informal woodland and shrubs. To the east and south of the house are lawns up to the ha-ha. In the fields beyond are a number of mature deciduous trees, including some large sycamores.

The walled garden is largely grassed over, with a few old fruit trees scattered about. At the entrance of the south drive to the forecourt there is a bank of mature evergreen shrubs and trees, including rhododendrons. There is a large ornamental cherry tree in the 'Italian Garden'. To the west of the forecourt are a few shrubs, including a pair of Irish yews flanking the small gateway in the forecourt wall.

The south drive is flanked by sycamores, including three pairs of large, ancient ones, said to be about 330 years old, one of which

has a 20 ft diameter (second largest in the country). The other trees are younger.

Along the west side of the garden is a belt of mature woodland, including beeches, large pines and larches, underplanted with rhododendrons. On the eastern fringe of this area are more ornamental shrubs, including some unusual rhododendrons. Between this area and the house is an area of grass and recently planted deciduous trees, while the northern half of the gardens is laid out with lawns and specimen conifers. Along the north drive is a row of large mature wellingtonias.

Reconstructions of original planted features
None

Special collections of garden plants
Sycamores in the drive are of special interest

Documented living plants
Sycamores in drive mentioned by Bradney

Other (including elements of nature conservation interest)
None

ESSENTIAL SETTING AND VIEWS BEYOND THE SITE

Essential setting: pasture fields to the N, E and S (between the garden and the road to Little Argoed)

Views: east from the house and terraces across the fields and over the Wye valley (A on map).

ANY SPECIAL FEATURES
None

SURVIVAL OF INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS

Structural components: most

Built components: most

Architectural ornaments: some

Planted components: most (trees and shrubs)

SOURCES

Primary

Sale Particulars 1892: in *The Argoed*

Secondary

Bradney, J., *A History of Monmouthshire II*, part II (1913), pp. 155-56.

Kissack, K., *The River Wye* (1978).

To be appended: 1:10,000 map of site, marked with boundaries, viewpoints etc.; colour photographs of site, photocopies of relevant material, where available.

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