

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

SITE DOSSIER

**SITE NAME** Plas Machen

**REF. NO.** PGW (Gt) 33

OS MAP 171 GRID REF. ST 235876

FORMER COUNTY Gwent UNITARY AUTHORITY Newport B.C. COMMUNITY  
COUNCIL Lower Machen

DESIGNATIONS Listed building: Plas Machen Grade II\*

National Park AONB SSSI NNR ESA GAM SAM CA

SITE EVALUATION Grade II

Primary reasons for grading  
Survival of Tudor integrated garden layout of terracing, walls and  
fishpond

TYPE OF SITE

Terraced formal garden; fishpond

MAIN PHASES OF CONSTRUCTION

16th century

VISITED BY/DATE Elisabeth Whittle/May 1991

## HOUSE

Name Plas Machen

Grid ref ST 235876

Date/style c. 1490/Tudor

### Brief description

Plas Machen is a stone two/three-storey house standing on the edge of a scarp overlooking the Rhymney river valley, on its E side. Below it is a steep drop to the flood plain of the river, which has been revetted with a massive retaining wall, and the level built up to give a level platform for the house and lower terraces of the garden. The main entrance to the house is a storeyed porch on the E side. The house is rambling, but basically T-shaped, and part of the original house has been demolished.

The house was built by Thomas Morgan in about 1490, and he or his son Rowland subsequently enlarged it. In 1580 the estates of Machen and Tredegar were united, and after the Civil War Plas Machen was abandoned for Tredegar, where a new house was built, and Plas Machen became a tenanted farmhouse. Before this it was a house of some grandeur and pretension, noted by Coxe at the beginning of the 19th century, when he described the stuccoed ceiling in the circular 'hunting room', with paintings of Diana and other classical themes in 13 compartments. This was in the now-demolished part of the E wing.

## OUTBUILDINGS

Name Various outbuildings

Grid ref ST 235876

### Date/style, and brief description

To the E of the house are various farm outbuildings, including stone barns and a single-storey stone cart shed with five stone arches.

## THE PLEASURE GARDEN

Grid ref ST 235876

Date/style 16th century/terraced, formal

### GENERAL DESCRIPTION, HISTORY AND LAYOUT

The garden lies to the S and E of the house. To the E is a levelled grassed forecourt bounded by a Tudor wall on the S, and later, probably 19th-century low walling on the N. The main area of gardens is to the S, where massive stone retaining walls contain a series of terraces, now all grassed over. There are two main walled compartments, divided by a high stone wall, both with two terraces with steep scarps between them. In the upper compartment, which is walled in stone (with some gaps) is a narrow terrace at the top, with a wide, gently sloping one below. In the lower compartment the upper terrace is narrower than the lower. At the N end of the upper terrace is a stone wall with a doorway through into the forecourt. The terraces overlook the Rhymney valley, and immediately below them is a rectangular level area with a narrow rectangular fishpond along its W side. Although this was probably primarily utilitarian it appears to have been deliberately incorporated into the overall scheme of the garden, as it is the exact length of the terraces and is aligned with them. Only the lower compartment is now in use as a garden; the upper compartment and the area below, bounded by the fishpond, are permanent pasture.

The garden would appear to be roughly contemporary with the house, possibly in its second phase of building in the 16th century, as the revetment wall which contains the built up levels of the terracing is also necessary for the house, which sits on the same artificial platform.

### STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

To the E of the house is a level rectilinear forecourt.

The main garden is surrounded by walls, is divided into two main enclosures by a N-S cross wall, and lies to the S and SE of the house. Within the enclosures the ground is terraced. Within the larger upper, eastern enclosure there are two terraces. These have been cut from the gently sloping ground, and the lower one, which is gently sloping itself, may be mostly on the natural ground surface. The upper terrace, along the E side of the enclosure, however, is levelled. It is c. 6 m. wide, with a scarp below it c. 1.5 m. high.

In the lower enclosure, to the W (to the S of the house) the ground has been built up above the natural slope, and is retained by large revetment walls to the S and W. On the W, valley side, the wall is c. 4 m. high on the outside. On the S it is up to 3 m. high (height increasing westwards), and is buttressed. In the SW corner are two buttresses, the southern one half fallen away. The top of the W wall is heavily overgrown with ivy. There are two terraces in the lower enclosure: the upper one, on the E side, is c. 11 m. wide, with a scarp below it c. 1.5 m. high. The lower terrace is level and is wider (c. two-thirds the width of the house).

Below the terraces is a rectangular level area of corresponding length. It is bounded on the S by a wide ditch and on the W by a narrow rectangular fishpond. The fishpond is shallow and much silted up and overgrown, but still has water in it. The dam is at the S end, with an outlet channel at the W end of the dam. This lower area is considered to be an integral part of the ornamental layout.

### BUILT COMPONENTS

The forecourt is bounded on the S by a stone wall c. 2.5 m. high, in which there is a plain doorway, with a horizontal lintel, into the

lower garden enclosure. The N side is bounded by a low stone and yellow brick wall with triangular stone cappings. It is in battlemented form, with iron railings in the gaps, and is probably 19th-century in date. The E side is bounded by iron fencing, with an iron gate into the upper enclosure.

The upper enclosure walls have two gaps: one on the NW side, where there is iron fencing bounding the forecourt, and the other in the NE corner, where the wall has been removed to allow vehicle access around some 20th-century farm buildings. The walls are of mortared rubble construction, and the N, E and S walls are 1.3-1.6 m. high, with a gap (farm) in the middle of the S wall. The W wall, which is the partition wall with the lower enclosure, is c. 3 m. high, and there is are two doorways in it, both with brick surrounds. All walls appear to stand more or less to their full height, although the W wall is uneven in height. Parts have modern cement capping.

The lower enclosure walls are of the same construction. The E wall is the same as the W wall of the upper enclosure (see above). The S and W walls are retaining walls for the terracing (see above) and rise c. 1 m. above interior ground level. The N side is bounded largely by the house. At the E end it is bounded by a wall with doorway and iron gate into the forecourt (see forecourt).

#### ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENTS

None

#### PLANTED COMPONENTS

The forecourt is largely lawn, with a few clipped evergreens along the N side.

The upper enclosure is now used as pasture, and is not part of the present-day garden.

The lower enclosure forms the main part of the present-day garden, and is laid out mainly to lawn, with vegetables on the terrace scarp and a few fruit trees on the lower terrace. The E and W walls are partly overgrown with ivy, particularly the W wall.

The lower area is pasture, and is not part of the present-day garden. The pond is overgrown with rank vegetation, willow, alder etc.

#### Reconstructions of original planted features

None

#### Special collections of garden plants

None

#### Documented living plants

None

#### Other (including elements of nature conservation interest)

None

#### ESSENTIAL SETTING AND VIEWS BEYOND THE SITE

Essential setting: pasture fields to the W, S and E of the gardens

Views: A: W across the Rhymney valley - unspoilt water meadows

#### ANY SPECIAL FEATURES

None

#### SURVIVAL OF INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS

Structural components: all  
Built components: most  
Architectural ornaments: -  
Planted components: none

SOURCES

(Primary and secondary. For primary, give location. Aerial photos (AP): ref. no and collection)

J.A.F. Pickford, *Between Mountain and Marsh* (1944).

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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