

## **ST BEUNO'S COLLEGE**

**Ref No** PGW (C) 35  
**OS Map** 116  
**Grid Ref** SJ 080 742  
**County** Denbighshire  
**District** Denbighshire

**Community Council** Tremeirchion

**Designations** Listed building: St.Beuno's College Grade II; The Rock Chapel, Our Lady of the Sorrows Grade II

**Site Evaluation** Grade II

### **Primary reasons for grading**

Good example of nineteenth-century designed garden attached to a religious house.

### **Type of Site**

Terraced fruit and vegetable garden and pleasure garden with formal elements.

### **Main Phases of Construction**

1846-49

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

St Beuno's College was founded in 1848, although the Jesuits had owned a farm in the Tremeirchion area since 1662. Lying in the lee of Moel Maenefa, St Beuno's faces west toward Snowdon and the Great Orme at Llandudno, with the Vale of Clwyd below. It was built in two main periods, 1846-49, and 1873-74. The architect of the first phase was J.A. Hansom, who designed a building in the local white limestone in a gothic style described by Hubbard as 'Pugin-inspired collegiate' and by Gerard Manley Hopkins, Jesuit priest and poet, who lived here from 1874 to 1877, as 'like Lancing College done worse'.

The main west front is dominated by a central four-storey tower with an oriel window. The wing to the left of the tower was added by Hansom & Son in 1873-74, and in order to accommodate it the minor road to the north of the college had to be re-routed. The front of this wing forms part of the entrance court on the east side, including the main entrance, with segmental arches on columns either side of the front door. To the right of the tower is the library, now a chapel, with a high pitched roof and buttressed walls. To the east of the chapel a part two-storey, and part three-storey wing climbs the hill. On the eastern side of the college buildings is the church of the the Holy Name which is part of the earlier work of the 1840s.

The Rock Chapel, Our Lady of the Sorrows, is situated on a rocky outcrop in a field to the south of the college buildings. The chapel was designed by Father Ignatius Scoles while a student at St Beuno's, and was built in 1866. It has a semi-circular apse and slender spire.

The majority of the gardens are situated to the west, east and south of the main building on the steep west-facing slope that the College is built on. In a letter to his father, written in 1874, Gerard Manley Hopkins described the gardens as 'all heights, terraces, Excelsiors, misty mountain tops, seats up trees called Crows' Nests, flight of steps seemingly up to heaven lined with burning aspiration upon aspiration of scarlet geraniums: it is very pretty and airy but it gives you the impression that if you took a step farther you would find yourself on Plenlimmon, Conway Castle, or Salisbury Craig'. Like the house, the garden appears to have been built in two main periods. The first period of 1846-49 included the west-facing kitchen garden terraces behind the house, of which there are five. These were originally planted with fruit trees, but are now mostly grassed over. The main north-south path is gravelled, and the path on the topmost terrace tarmacked, but most of the gravel paths on the terraces are now grassed over. The long flight of steps to the south of the house forms an axial line through the terraces, flanked by clipped Irish yews. This line is continued with the steps following through to the next level down, lining up with the west front of the house. A side axis is formed by another set of steps leading to the grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes. The original steps are of slate, but some have been replaced with concrete. They are flanked by large nineteenth-century urns of reconstituted stone.

Below the terraces on the south side of the house is another separate terrace on which are three circular formal beds. To the south of this area, and on a higher level reached by steps is a grotto to Our Lady of Lourdes, a small artificial cave of dripstone. The grotto was built sometime after 1871, probably at the time of the second period of building 1873-74. It is backed by a dense planting of rhododendrons and laurels. Just to the west of the grotto a wooded walk leads to the garden boundary, and then strikes out across a field to the wooded promontory where the Rock Chapel, to Our Lady of the Sorrows, stands. Next to the walk to the Rock Chapel and behind the grotto are two disused hard tennis courts, dating to after 1871.

On the south side of the house are steps to the west descending to the west terrace at the front of the house. This originally formed part of the main drive, which descended down the hill to the B5429, but this entrance is no longer used. The grounds are now entered from a lane on the north side of the house. This was probably resorted to after the route of the lane had been changed to accommodate the extra wing on the front of the house in 1873, which resulted in an entrance court on the north side of the house.

The west terrace is supported by a stone retaining wall 2 m. high. This in turn once formed the back wall for a row of lean to glasshouses, now replaced by a border. After the north wing was added in 1873-74, the terrace was also extended to the north. The 1871 Ordnance Survey map shows an open area of ground below the terrace, with a perimeter planting of trees, encircled by a path, with a path leading off to the now unused drive to the west. Another path led to 'feature' of some kind just to the south which looks like a specimen tree, encircled by a path. This area below the terrace now consists of shrub

plantings in beds, with a background of cherry Laurel and rhododendron. A more recent innovation is a cement lined pond, now dried up.

An informal lime walk forms a continuation of the west terrace walk, with another walk to the west just above the B5429. An area of orchard lies to the east of the lime walk. This has been planted with Christmas trees in recent year as a cash crop, but they were never cut and are now over mature for such a purpose.

A cemetery for the college is situated to the south of the main kitchen garden terraces.

## **Sources**

### **Secondary**

Thomas, A., 'G.M. Hopkins and St Beuno's College', Flintshire Historical Society Publications 25 (1971-72), pp. 95-102.

Hubbard, E., Clwyd (1986), p. 450.