

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

**REGISTER ENTRY**

**MISKIN MANOR**

<b>Ref number</b>	<b>PGW (Gm) 9 (RCT)</b>
<b>OS Map</b>	170
<b>Grid ref</b>	ST 056 802
<b>Former county</b>	Mid Glamorgan
<b>Unitary authority</b>	Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council
<b>Community council</b>	Pont-y-clun
<b>Designations</b>	SSSI (part)
<b>Site evaluation</b>	<b>Grade II</b>
<b>Primary reasons for grading</b>	Well preserved Edwardian terraced garden with yew topiary and 'king's beasts', in Tudor style to complement the house, and some fine specimen trees. Unusually ornamental walled kitchen garden with remains of canal, pool and flanking yew hedges
<b>Type of site</b>	Landscape park; Victorian and Edwardian pleasure grounds and gardens; walled kitchen garden.
<b>Main phases of construction</b>	1857 - c. 1914

**Site description**

Miskin Manor is a largely Victorian mansion situated on ground sloping to the south and west on the east side of the Ely valley. The house lies towards the south-east end of a small park which stretches westwards to Miskin village. Miskin Manor is a two- and three-storey house of greyish local stone with lighter sandstone dressings. The house has mullioned and transomed windows, tall pairs of chimneys and four-centred doorways. Carved sandstone beasts stand on the corners of the roof parapets. The main entrance front is on the west side, which has four projecting gabled bays (the southern one only at ground-floor level). The east side has one single-storey and one two-storey projecting bay, chimneys on gable ends, and irregular two- and three-storey arrangements of windows. A plain hotel extension was added on this side in about 1990.

Miskin, Maes Cun (lovely plain) in Welsh, is first mentioned in the Hywel Dda law codes of 940 as a commote, or hundred, called 'Miscin'. There has been a house on the site since the mediaeval period. In the late eleventh century a manor here was the home of the Prince of Glamorgan's daughter, Nest, who was promised to Einion ab

Collwyn in marriage in 1092. After that date Einion lived at Miskin. In 1540 Leland mentioned 'Miskin Gate' as one of the entrances to the village. From about 1610 to 1857 the manor was a seat of a cadet branch of the Bassetts of Old Beaupre. The plan and irregularities in the thickness of the walls suggest that the house might have been a U- or E-shaped double-pile house at this time.

In 1857 Miskin was bought by David Williams, a son of William Williams. William had moved from Aberpergwm, in the Vale of Neath, to Castellau, north of Llantrisant, in 1808. David Williams rebuilt and extended the house in 1864, in neo-Jacobean style. The work was continued by David's son, Judge Gwilym Williams (1839-1906). The following owner, Sir Rhys Rhys Williams, made further improvements to the house; the rainwater heads carry the initials 'R W'. During Sir Rhys's ownership there was much high society entertaining at Miskin. The house was twice gutted by fire, in 1922 and 1952. Subsequently the house was sold by Sir Brandon Rhys Williams and restored. It is now run as a hotel.

To the north of the house, running north-south at right-angles to it, is a long stone outbuilding with small mullioned windows. It is linked to the house by a rounded archway. This building is now in use as an annexe to the hotel, but has been converted from an outbuilding, and was probably originally a barn. Further modern extensions to the hotel have been built to the north-east of the house.

The park lies on rolling ground on the east side of the river Ely. It is roughly triangular in shape, and is bounded on the west by Miskin village, on the south-west by the river, on the south by the M4 and on the east by the A4119. The building of the M4 and A4119, in the 1960s, truncated the outlying parts of the park on these sides and involved a considerable amount of tree felling.

The early history of the park is obscure. The ha-ha on the south edge of the garden, giving a view out over the park, suggests eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century landscaping. The main landscaping probably took place after 1857, when David Williams carried out extensive work on the house. By the 1870s (1st edition Ordnance Survey maps) the main features were in place. In 1898 Taliesin Morgan described the grounds and gardens as 'among the finest in the county'.

The principal feature of the park is the long drive, now mostly disused, from Miskin village to the west front of the house. The original entrance in the village is now cut off from the park. It had a small single-storey lodge in neo-Jacobean style, now a private house, and an imposing entrance flanked by tall stone piers. Most of this entrance was dismantled some time ago, and the stonework placed next to the former drive to the east of the cricket ground. One pier remains. The western half of the drive is now an earthen track flanked by horse chestnuts leading to the village cricket ground. To the east it continues as a tree-lined farm track, with a row of time-share houses at its eastern end, after which it joins the main drive to the house. The eastern half of the drive is partly lined with horse chestnuts with some underplanting of rhododendrons.

The house is now approached by a new drive from the north, with the exit along a short drive off the minor road from Croffta to the north-east. This exit road was the original secondary drive, leading to the service area. The modern A4119 cutting destroyed the drive to the east of the house, which now passes over the cutting on a high bridge.

The park is open grassland with isolated deciduous trees on the sloping ground above the river. These are mainly oak, sycamore, and lime. To the south of the house, beyond the ha-ha, is a grass field sloping gently to the south. In it are a number of specimen deciduous trees, including oak, plane, and poplar. A belt of deciduous trees

runs south along the steep slope next to the Ely river, and below the garden terraces are some large specimen trees, including two limes, oak, and plane. Beyond, to the west, are some mature beeches.

The main gardens lie to the east, south, and west of the house, on ground sloping down towards the Ely valley to the west. The tarmac drive sweeps round north of the house to the forecourt on the west side. This is a level rectangular area now used for car parking which forms the top terrace of a series of three stepped down the slope west of the house. To its north is an area of large pine trees in grass. The terrace is bounded on the west side by a stone revetment wall topped with flat coping stones. The wall is flush with the ground surface except at the north end where there is a low parapet wall. At the north end two flights of wide stone steps flanked by piers topped by ball finials lead down to the middle terrace. At the south end of the upper terrace four stone steps lead down to a wide grass path flanked by a box hedge on the east side and the flat coping of the revetment wall on the west. The path leads to wide stone steps at the south end of the garden leading down to the woodland belt on the edge of the valley.

The middle terrace is a lawn with flat coping at ground level topping the revetment wall. The north end is wider than the south, and from it wide stone steps lead down to the lower terrace. At the north end is a semi-rustic open-sided pavilion with stone walls and a gently pitched roof. Tree-trunk columns flank the entrance. Inside are wooden benches along the sides. Behind the pavilion are some large evergreen oak trees.

The lower terrace is partly grass and partly overgrown. Below the terraces, to their north-west, is a modern car park in an area of mixed mature trees, with a small pond below. There are some large specimen trees on the valley floor below, including two limes, oaks, and planes.

To the south and east of the house are large terraced lawns bounded on the east and west by yew hedges. The hedge along the west side has a crenellated top. Set against the taller sections are six stone 'king's beasts' on octagonal columns. These Tudor-style ornaments are mythical beasts holding copper banners and are a feature of the garden; there is a pair flanking the front door, and a further pair flanking the steps up to the door on the east side of the house. To the south of the house is a level lawn bounded on the south by a low ruinous dry-stone revetment wall. On the edge of the lawn are two large stone bowls decorated with swags in relief. That on the west side is partly defaced. Below is another lawn bounded by a stone ha-ha on the garden boundary. This has three semi-circular projections, and its top is uneven. In the south-east corner of the lawn is a large copper beech tree.

A flagstone path runs from the forecourt along the south and east fronts of the house, and there are two *Magnolia grandifloras* growing against the south wall. The lawn east of the house is bounded on the east by a low stone revetment wall punctuated by taller piers topped by large ball finials. In the middle a flight of stone steps leads to a grass walk along the top of the revetment wall backed by a tall topiary yew hedge cut into four arches, with three gaps. In front of it are four king's beasts.

To the east is an area of mixed deciduous and coniferous woodland with an overgrown yew hedge, with recesses, along the south side. Within the woodland are some large specimen trees, including a cut-leafed beech, acers, including two purple-leafed forms, a wellingtonia, a lime, magnolias, and some rhododendrons. In the middle of an opening in the wood is a sundial on a circular base.

To the north-west of the house is a triangular area of woodland grounds, to the north of which is the walled kitchen garden. A path originally ran through the woodland

along a small stream to the kitchen garden, but this is now mostly overgrown and disused. However, at the north end of the wood, next to the entrance to the kitchen garden, the stream, which emerges from a rockwork culvert and is rock-lined, is flanked by former paths cut into the slopes. These have dry-stone revetment walls on their upper sides, above which are rows of overgrown pleached beech trees. Box bushes and bamboos are also planted in the area, and to the east is a yew hedge parallel with the pleached beeches. A pond shown at the north end of the wood on the 1870s Ordnance Survey map has now gone. A ditch revetted with a wall on its east side runs just inside the west boundary of the wood. This has the appearance of a ha-ha, and marks the former west boundary of the wood.

At the south end of the woodland, where the stream cuts down to form a small valley, the grounds have been ornamented with paths and stone steps down to and along the stream and a series of small ponds. Around the ponds are bamboos, acers, pines, and Chusan palms. The two upper ponds lie between the two stone bridges carrying the drive through the area. The valley is in the process of being cleared, and the ponds are being dredged and their dams renewed. A new gravel walk and terrace have been made on the east side of the valley.

The gardens were made in several phases. The earliest part is probably the terracing to the west of the house. In its present form this is Edwardian, but it may have had its origin in the Tudor or Jacobean period. Copies of letters, accounts and memoranda, dating to 1774-76, indicate that the Bassetts were very active at that time in both maintenance and new work in the house and garden, spending considerable amounts on money on both. Copies of letters to Richard Howell, probably the agent, refer to planting, to greenhouses ('open Windows and Doors in dry weather'), to wall fruit, potatoes, strawberries, gooseberries, currants, chamomile, violets and sweet briar roses (for new hedges). There are references to new layout, including a walk 'down to Waterside ... Gravell near Pont LaBont and in the River fit for these Walks' and another walk 'up the Firsgrove'.

In the 1870s (Ordnance Survey map) the terraces are shown with central steps leading down to a canalized tributary of the river. This layout of steps was altered in the Edwardian period to the grander wide flights of steps at the north end that remain today. The ha-ha along the south boundary of the garden is probably late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century in date. The 1870s map shows the gardens at this time as laid out with informal mixed planting, with a lawn to the south of the house and the carriage drive sweeping round from the west front to the east. The present layout of terraced lawns, yew hedging and topiary and king's beasts thus dates to Sir Rhys Rhys Williams's ownership during the Edwardian period. A photograph of about 1898 (Morgan, 1898) shows the terraces, but no yew hedging, and at the same time the grounds were said to contain fine shrubs, tropical plants and some fine old beech trees. The king's beasts are similar both in appearance and date to those at St Donat's Castle (PGW (Gm 30)), and may have had the same source.

To the north-west of the house the woodland was ornamented in the 1870s by a path to the kitchen garden and a pond at the north end. The drive from the east did not extend through the area at that time. The north bridge, ponds, and ornamental planting at the south end of the wood are all Edwardian in date. The planting has a Japanese bias and this area was probably conceived as a Japanese garden.

The walled kitchen garden lies to the north of the house, at the north end of the woodland grounds. A path formerly ran through the woodland from the house to the middle of the entrance in the middle of the south side of the kitchen garden.

The garden is rectangular, aligned east-west, surrounded by walls *c.* 3.5 m high, of stone on the north side and brick on the remaining sides. The south wall is buttressed and has a gap at the west end. Two stone bothies lie against the outside of the north wall. In the centre of the south wall is a section of iron railings on a low brick wall, with a central wrought-iron gate and overthrow flanked by square brick piers with stone tops. The railings terminate with tall square brick piers topped with stone ball finials. The interior is now very overgrown, but the central ornamental layout survives. This consists of a north-south stone-lined narrow canal with brick edging, flanked by overgrown yew hedges. At its north end there are stone steps and an arched culvert where the water enters the garden. At the south end it narrows and then opens out into a circular pool from which the water runs into an underground culvert which has now fallen in. The present layout of the garden was in existence in the 1870s (Ordnance Survey map). The cross and perimeter paths in each half of the garden, on either side of the canal, have become obscured. In the 1870s the garden was planted with fruit trees and appears not to have had any glasshouses.

## **Sources**

### **Primary**

Bassett of Miskin memorandum, account and copy letter book. Glamorgan Record Office: D/D Xge 24/4.

### **Secondary**

Morgan, T., *The History of Llantrisant* (1898), pp. 125-27.

Lewis, D., *The History of Llantrisant* (1975), pp. 96-99.

Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales, *Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Glamorgan*, IV (1981), p. 342.

Newman, J., *The buildings of Wales. Glamorgan* (1995), pp. 449-50.