

BLACKALDERN

Ref number	PGW (Dy) 27 (PEM)
OS map	158
Grid ref	SN 1198 1424
Former county	Dyfed
Unitary authority	Pembrokeshire
Community council	Narberth
Designations	Listed buildings: House and Coachhouse Grade II Tree Preservation Orders on selected trees within the woodland
Site evaluation	Grade II

Primary reasons for grading A charming and well preserved garden probably created at the beginning of the last century to complement the 'gentleman's residence'. Although there are few structural components, there is an interesting and unusual collection of ericaceous and other plants within the woodland garden. These include many unusual, early introductions of rhododendrons which are of great horticultural and historical interest.

Type of site Formal garden surrounding house. Woodland walks to the south-east where the native trees have been underplanted with an interesting collection of deciduous azaleas and rhododendrons.

Main phases of construction Early - mid nineteenth century

Site description

Blackaldern, formerly referred to as 'Blackalder', was once part of the Cresselly estate and was, until recently, owned by the de Quincy family. The present house is at the end of a sweeping drive off the B 4314, about a kilometre to the south-east of Narberth. The house appears to be mostly Georgian in character, but with later additions and alterations. The house is a mainly two-storeyed block with a former kitchen wing to the north-west. There are cellars below and a hipped slate roof above; the first-floor garden (south) front is also slate covered, with the remainder of the house being stuccoed and wisteria covered. To the south is the front door, which is off-set in a projecting bay; above is a 'Tudor-style' drip-stone. Behind (to the north of) the house are the rear doors that lead to the former kitchens as well as to the rest of the house. There is a full length window within the study to the west; the rest of the windows appear to be twelve-light sashes.

To the south of the house, the land slopes away to the brook (un-named) that enters the Eastern Cleddau river at Cannaston Bridge to the west. To the north the land continues to

rise, although there are the remains of an enclosure that was probably the former kitchen garden.

To the west of the house and probably contemporary with it is the enclosed stable yard. To the north of the yard, with the doors facing on to it, is the coachhouse. This is a lime-washed stone structure with one arched and one square opening and a slate roof. Both the openings have wooden doors.

To the west of the yard are the recently renovated stables and garage. The stone walling, standing to *c.* 1.25 m, is probably original. Above this has been added a wooden clad partition, on top of which is a new pitched corrugated iron roof. To the south of the yard, and again with the entrances facing the yard, is a small stone range with a single pitched roof. This range may be later than the coachhouse, but a structure is recorded here in 1888. The purpose of this range is not known. There are no windows or lights and within the front wall are three entrances; two pedestrian and square-headed and a third, arched entrance that has subsequently been partially blocked. This arched opening is curious as, at its maximum height it is now probably just under 1.5 m, far too low for most conventional uses.

To the east of the yard are a cluster of three small buildings, but again, the original function is not known. Against one of these buildings grows a mature fig tree. The southern drive enters the yard from the south.

Narberth and the surrounding area is one of ancient settlement. To the south of the town are the ancient, prehistoric settlements of Narberth Mountain and Camp Hill. Within the town itself is the castle and the areas' medieval heritage is echoed in place-names, such as 'Knight's Way' and in the archaeological remains of churches, homesteads and mottes. The undulating landscape of this part of Pembrokeshire is cut by glacial and water-worn valleys, although the maximum height of the surrounding hills is only some 152 m AOD.

Blackaldern house and gardens are set on a south-facing valley side, to the north of Narberth. To the south and east of the house is a small, rather formal garden of lawns and shrubs, through which the drive sweeps from the gated entrance. Throughout the grounds are mature examples of both native and exotic trees, underplanted on the drive and to the south-east with rhododendrons and other shrubby exotics. To the sides of the lawns that make up much of the formal garden is a good mix of woody and shrubby material. To the front of the house is a semi-mature oak under which is a profusion of cyclamen. To the east are several forms of hydrangea and camellia; whilst to the west are honeysuckles, acers, mahonias and some azaleas. The main area for azaleas within the formal garden is to the south-east. Here is a dense thicket of deciduous and other azaleas (rhododendrons) through which there is a narrow path. The main plantings of *Ericaceae*, however, appear in the woodland garden. To the east and separated from the formal garden area by a paddock is the woodland garden, now called Blackaldern Plantation on modern maps. The woodland garden has been established on the sides of a small sheltered valley and has proved to be an ideal setting for shade and moisture loving plants.

The copy of the Tithe map of *c.* 1840 is extremely worn in this part of the parish; however, there are references in the Schedule of Apportionments that note two gardens; one being '1 rod 20 perches' the other, being just over an acre. The First Edition 25in Ordnance Survey map, for which the survey was undertaken in 1888 refers to the dwelling as 'Blackalder' and the wooded valley to the south-east and at a short distance from the house, as 'Blackalder Wood'. The survey shows that the house, outbuildings and the garden surrounding the house occupy about 3 acres. To the south, the drive sweeps around the front of the house; much as it does today. South of the drive is a small formal garden and to the

south again, a small, almost rectangular, lake is shown. A drive from the south is also shown. This crosses the ford at Brook Cottage (now a ruin) and follows the field boundary due north, entering the garden area immediately to the east of the lake. To the west of the house is the yard, coachhouse and stable complex. To the north is a small, irregularly shaped, garden enclosure in which a rectangular path arrangement is shown.

By the publication of the Second Edition Ordnance Survey map (1907) very little appears to have changed and the garden and wooded areas appear to be identical. Unfortunately, neither survey shows the existence of the paths within Blackaldern wood. Today the major elements are still evident, although the lake to the south is now dry and partly filled with rubble, presumably from when the house was altered, as the rubble includes some dressed stone.

The southern drive, which remains as a sunken or hollow way, would have been reached from Twll Lane, that skirts the eastern side of Narberth Mountain. A ford is recorded in 1888, enabling the small stream to be crossed next to Brook Cottage. From here, the drive heads almost due north following extant field boundaries. Where it enters the curtilage of the house there are two, 'Pembrokeshire' style gate piers. These gate piers are characterised usually by being built as a small circular tower; sometimes turf filled, sometimes rubble and occasionally they can achieve a massive girth. The ones at the entrance to Blackaldern are modest, *c.* 0.75 m in diameter. From the gateway, the drive swings to the west, curving around below the formal garden adjacent to the house and entering the stable yard from the south. The total length of the drive is *c.* 750 m.

The entrance to the north-east, or main drive is set back from the B4314 and is marked by squared gate pillars that terminate the semi-circular stone wall. The drive heads due south for 100 m before heading almost due west for a further 150 m to the house. The surface is tarmac over chippings. To the east of the first stretch of the drive is an earthen bank that is *c.* 1.25 m high at its maximum. To either side of the second, westerly section, are laurels, heathers and rhododendrons. To the north, uphill and slightly away from the drive, is a fine stand of beech and oak.

Immediately to the east of the house, the drive divides; one fork leads to the stable yard to the west of the house whilst the other, gravel surfaced, fork sweeps around to the front, south, of the house. The configuration of this drive appears to be identical to that recorded at the end of the last century.

There are now no extant water features. However, at the turn of the century a small lake or pond is shown at SN 1195 1415 and some elements remain. The pond appears to have been constructed with a stone retaining wall (maximum height probably just over 1 m), that was rendered on the inside; traces of this remain. To the west is a sluice that links with a further cast iron arrangement beyond what would have been the pond. The whole is now filled with rubble and is rather overgrown. Within the rubble a length of carved, moulded stone is visible, which may have been removed from the house when it was renovated some years ago. Along the upper (northern) perimeter of the pond area, a small orchard has been planted.

The woodland garden occupies an area of *c.* 3.5 acres to the east of the house, from which it is separated by a paddock. The garden has been created on the east and west facing slopes of a small valley; through the centre of which runs a small stream. The mature oaks provide a light canopy of shade and protection for the exotic under-plantings and there are occasional exotic and indigenous pines. A series of small paths meander through the valley, occasionally crossing the stream and associated drainage channels by rustic wooden bridges.

In the late nineteenth century, Blackaldern was the home of William Allen, a keen traveller and collector of plants. Local tradition maintains that Allen flew to Tibet specifically to collect rhododendron seeds and seedlings for his garden at Narberth; this story has yet to be verified. What is certain, is that either by accident or design this rhododendron collection contains some unusual early introductions. In addition to the rhododendrons, the stream side has been planted with skunk cabbage (*Lysichiton americanum*) and bamboo. Towards the paddock are magnolias and a clerodendron. Many plants within the collection are now mature, but it is anticipated that remedial work within the near future will ensure its survival.

There are many unusual species and hybrid rhododendrons in the woodland and these have been surveyed by I.T. and J.H. Stokes (May 1997). Noteworthy specimens include: *R. arboreum*, *R. arizelum*, *R. augustinii*, *R. auriculatum*, *R. cinnabarinum*, *R. concinnum*, *R. decorum*, *R. falconeri*, *R. fictolacteum*, *R. fulvum*, *R. galactinum*, *R. griersonianum*, *R. orbiculare*, *R. reticulatum*, *R. yakushmanum*, *R. Cynthia*, *R. Tally Ho*, *R. Loderi*, *R. Loders White*, *R. Hawk*, *R. 'Gomer Waterer'*, *R. Alice*, *R. Pink Pearl*, *R. Gauntlettii*, *R. 'Sir Charles Lemon'*, *R. 'Boddaertianum'*, *R. Dawn*, *R. Britannia*, *R. Vuyk's Rosy Red*.

There are other interesting exotic shrubs within the woodland, including acers, camellias, choisya, enkianthus, embothrium, liquidambar, magnolia, roses and viburnum.

Just to the north of the house is a small walled, almost rectangular enclosure, the walls standing to a maximum of 1.25-1.5 m. This may have once been the kitchen garden, but no-one spoken to had any recollection of this use and it is now under grass.

Sources

Primary

Tithe Award Map and Schedule of Apportionments, (c. 1830), copy available at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

Stokes IT & JH, unpublished report 'Blackaldern ~ Rhododendrons and other exotic plants' (May 1997), copy with authors.

Secondary

Dyfed Archaeological Trust, PRNs 25333, 25334, 25335

Whittle E, *The historic gardens of Wales* (1992), p. 68.

First and Second Edition 25in Ordnance Survey maps, (1889 & 1907).