

BODFACH HALL

Ref No	PGW (Po) 55 (POW)
OS Map	125
Grid Ref	SJ 135203
Former County	Powys
Unitary Authority	Powys
District	Montgomeryshire
Community Council	Llanfyllin
Designations	Listed Buildings: House Grade II; stables Grade II
Site Evaluation	Grade II
Primary reasons for grading	Well preserved Victorian garden of one of the principal Montgomeryshire houses. Much of the tree, shrub and topiary planting from the second half of the nineteenth century survives.
Type of Site	Formal and informal Victorian garden including shrubberies and walks, tree planted lawns and south terraces.
Main Phases of Construction	Present house rebuilt c. 1870, contemporary gardens, house opened as hotel 1946.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Bodfach Hall stands partly obscured within a wooded garden surrounded by its degraded park, about 1 km north-west of Llanfyllin town. A drive, now a rough track, enters the park on the south-east, to the east of a lodge, before proceeding north and then west across the park to enter the garden halfway down its east side. About 30m from the garden boundary the drive enters a small rectangular gravel forecourt on the east entrance front of the house.

The house is a large, square block of two storeys. Further dormers are set in the low hipped slate roof, which is set with polygonal yellow brick chimneys. On the east front there are four pairs of sash windows, with an additional centre tripartite window over a ground floor Doric Bath stone porch. A set of six dressed stone steps connects the forecourt with the interior front door. Four pairs of sash windows, and dormers, continue along the south front, which is ornamented by an open nineteenth-century iron veranda supported by five columns. The east

front is covered with ivy.

The west of the house has been remodelled since 1946. A Gothick eighteenth-century front door, which was relocated from the west front in 1870, stands at the north-east corner of a raised sun terrace facing south. From 1946 a new function room and bar extension were added to the west front. The sun terrace is the site of a Victorian conservatory. Dressed stone edging, stone paving slabs and indentations of the paved floor and wall mark the position of this feature.

A single-storey brick service range, which incorporates an open walled yard, lies to the north of the house. This area contained a brewhouse, which is now used as a holiday cottage. The house has retained some of its Victorian interiors in addition to an older 'oak room' and staircase.

Bodfach Hall has an ancient history. The earliest record of the estate dates back to 1160 when it was included in the will of Madoc ap Meredydd, Prince of Powys. A residence was probably erected on the site after 1256 when the family's nearby castle of Tomen yr Allt was destroyed. Sion Kyffin, a descendant of Madoc, extended a house on the site in 1661. This work is recorded in an inscription above the inside of the old main Gothick door on the west of the house.

In the late eighteenth century a descendant of Kyffin's, Bell Lloyd, married the rich border heiress Anne Price, whose land included the manor of Presteigne. With her money Lloyd was able to rebuild the house from about 1761 and lay out the surrounding park, which included the planting of over 170,000 trees. It is Lloyd's house which forms the core and form of the present house. Thomas Pennant recorded a visit to Bodfach in 1781 in his Welsh Tour but he failed to include a description of any grounds.

Bell's son was created Lord Mostyn and the estate continued to pass through the family until 1838 when it was sold. In 1848 a tithe map recorded Sir John Wilson, Bart. as the owner. The estate came, by marriage, into the Lomax family from Lancashire in the 1850s. The Lomaxes retained Bodfach until 1944 when the estate was split up. In 1946 the house was opened as a hotel by the Tunstil family, who ran it until the present owners bought the hotel in the 1960s. Mrs Tunstil and her brother, Mr Jones, live in the stables and Hafod y Garn respectively.

The stables are situated to the north of the east front of the hotel, creating the northern part of a large courtyard. Between the hotel forecourt and the south front of the stables there is a 12m wide lawn, which extends along the length of the building, that was the site of a croquet lawn. The stables are of white painted brick with a hipped slate roof with a central octagonal cupola on the ridge. On the south front of the building there are a series of wide, recessed arches, the former carriage houses. The central arch is set with an ogee door and windows. A small quatrefoil window above the door lights what was a spinning room, later a dovecote. The stables were originally a barn, converted into stables and a coach house in the nineteenth century before being converted again into a private house from about 1950.

The garden of Bodfach Hall covers about 4 acres and lies to the west, south and east of the

house. It is enclosed by Rookery Wood to the north and the park to the south and east. The garden faces south on a gentle downhill slope and is mainly composed of tree and shrub planted lawns.

A dense belt of trees and shrubs surrounds the garden on the south and east. Where the drive enters the site it passes between a pair of 4m high blocks of clipped holly, before bisecting a rhododendron walk, which continues for about 20m to the north and south, the path continuing around the south boundary of the garden. Near the east boundary the drive branches to the north-west. A line of mature azalea bushes runs along the east side of this drive on the west of the rhododendron tunnel. To the north of the azaleas the line of an old drive is evident, leading to the north-east. This creates a wide grass path which leads into a tree planted dell. Along the north side of this dell there is what appears to be an old rock garden. On the south there is a low raised mound which is planted with a pair of mature Golden-rain trees (*Koelreuteria paniculata*) and a Japanese maple. The line of the drive continues to climb to the north-east where it leads on to a level terrace, about 4m wide, before continuing in a straight line for about 50m. The north side of this terrace is overhung with mature laurel growing along the south boundary of Rookery Wood and on the south, the ground slopes down to the iron fence park boundary. At the eastern end of this walk there is a derelict garden building facing south-west. Part of a semi-circular rubble stone wall survives and bricks are scattered in the grass around.

As the main drive enters the east forecourt a row of three clipped golden yew topiaries, now large irregular spheres, runs along the south edge of a flat rectangular terrace lawn which runs north to a terrace on the south front of the stable. The lawn is about 8m wide and about 20m long. At its eastern end there is a yew hedge which backs on to the short length of drive connecting the main and service drives on the west. This was the site of a croquet lawn.

A raised planted terrace runs along the east front of the house. Mature topiary balls, spirals and standard 'lollipops' grow on the terrace. Opposite the east front a split level lawn, enclosed by mature shrubs, runs back east to the garden boundary. On the immediate east of the forecourt there is a 2m wide strip of random paving, edged on the north and south by lavender, beyond which there is a small circular flower garden of four cut beds and a raised grass path. The upper level of the lawn to the east of the circular garden is bumpy and irregular, the lower, eastern level is flat.

From the south side of the east lawn the tree planted lawn continues in a gentle slope to the south boundary, which is virtually obscured by scrubs. Mature redwood, Douglas fir, copper beech, Lawson cypress, thuja and Scots pine grow in this area. The lawn continues to the west, becoming a steep grass slope beneath the south terrace, which has two island shrub beds on its east side.

The east terrace continues to the south front of the house, where it widens to about 4m. This continues, as the verandah, along the length of the house. A central axis runs south from the centre of the verandah to a pair of iron gates in the south garden boundary. The axis is marked by sets of stone and tile steps which link two parallel terraces below the verandah. The upper terrace is planted with four spiral yew topiaries on the north side of a narrow gravel walk, which continues around the west side of the house. A narrow border runs along the south. The second terrace is wider, about 3m, and is enclosed along the south by a

concrete and randomly paved bed set with planting holes. Four elegant stone basket-weave planters stand along this terrace and two cast iron statue or lamp bases stand on a low wall which runs along the south side of the terrace, curving around to the west. Stumps of large golden yew and thuja stand on either side of the steps which connect the upper and lower terrace. These are starting to regrow. A final set of nine steps leads south down the steep grass slope, continuing the axis towards the gates in the south boundary.

Three more spiral yews grow along the south edge of the lower terrace, to the west of the central axis. These are interspersed with berberis and other shrubs. The walk along the lower terrace concludes opposite the site of the conservatory on the west of the house. However its line continues, marking the site of an old drive, as a raised grass ridge, across the north of the garden to a latticework nineteenth-century iron gateway to the north-west of the house.

At the end of the lower terrace walk the garden slopes down to the south-west. A cast concrete path continues the line of another path which runs south-west on a diagonal linking the site of the conservatory with the terraces. The concrete path leads into the lower garden to a small rectangular formal garden on the site of a former pond. This is laid out in gravel, stone-edged beds. A small classical stone statue of Juno stands on the north of the garden. To the west of this feature there is another pair of mature Golden rain trees (*Koelreuteria paniculata*). Beyond the trees the garden enters a rectangular area which extends out into the park. Native willow and alder, with a new conifers on the north, surround what is now a large area of marshy ground. This was the site of the large garden pond. A small stream flows down the east side of this area, the west boundary of the garden. About 4m to the north-west of the gravel and stone garden a channel branches off this same stream to the south-east. It appears to enter a chain of small ponds, now dry and full of litter, one of which is crossed by a low curved concrete bridge.

To the north of the formal garden the lawn, planted with a few large old yew and beech, runs north to the north boundary to the iron gates. Outside the gates on the west, at a right angles to them, there is a second, almost identical gate.

A conservatory stood on the west side of the house. Its base, of stone paving and dressed stone surround survives. On the west a set of four dressed stone steps descends between a pair of mature clipped box balls on to a diagonal path which heads south-west to link up with the concrete path into the south-west garden. This path runs between a small area of planting which includes a mature thuja and narrow flower beds edged in nineteenth-century edging tiles. At the south-west end of the path a further three stone steps leads down on to the west end of the lower terrace walk. On the south side of the conservatory a pair of stone steps leads down on to a small concrete sun terrace which is ornamented by a simple pebble mosaic. The conservatory and sun terrace stand about 1m above the level of the south terraces.

From the steps on the west of the conservatory a second path continues along the western side of the service range, underneath a series of modern rose arches, to a gateway in the wall. This path continues to the north to a large hardcore parking area, which is separated from the garden by a white painted nineteenth-century iron fence. On the northern end of the west wall of the service court wall, which stands on the east of the car park, there is an ornate stone

dolphin finial.

The earliest record which suggests that an ornamental garden existed at Bodfach is found on the Moses Griffith watercolour, included in Pennant's Tours of Wales, of 1776, which shows a wall around a raised terrace, standing above the park. No internal details concerning the appearance of the terrace are known to have survived.

In the sale particulars of 1838 the gardens were described as 'lawn and plantation'. Interestingly, at this time, indeed until at least 1888, the walled kitchen garden lay above the Rookery wood, which the particulars suggested that a subsequent owners could make 'ornamental with walks etc'.

A tithe map of 1848 provides the next record of the garden and records the present simple form. The garden was described as 'shrubbery' with the woodland behind, with the 'house, offices and fold' to the west. A pond, which later became a water garden, was recorded in the south-west garden. The tithe map also recorded the present arrangement of the drives, but not the lodges, showing that an old drive, believed to date from the eighteenth century which entered the site from the north-east, had been abandoned by this time. The area around the line of the old drive had been incorporated into the garden by this date, perhaps as a result of the Wilsons following the sale advice of 1838, replacing the drive with a straight walk.

Photographs dating from the late nineteenth century, in addition to those included in Kretchmer's Llanfyllin, show a formal garden with clipped topiary pyramids on the north front of the forecourt, the surviving golden yew, the standard lollipop box and spirals on the east front of the house and what appears to be an ornate parterre with stone-edged beds, planted with sub-tropical planting, and gravel walks on the lawn to the east of the house. The photographs also include one of a small pond, which lay to the south-west of the house, with a central classical statue. One of the Lomax daughters is pictured on the pond in a coracle.

The gardens are well recorded on both the 1888 and 1903 Ordnance Survey maps and show that little had changed in the garden from the mid nineteenth century. The present layout, of lawns and shrubberies, is again recorded, but containing circulatory walks and a summer house at the end of the old drive on the garden boundary. The planting, ironwork, planters and south front terrace are all believed to date from the mid nineteenth century as is the conservatory which is recorded in 1888. It would seem that the ornamental features of the present garden were therefore constructed by the Lomax family.

The site was sold by the Lomaxes in 1944. In 1946 it reopened as a hotel and between then and the 1960s the conservatory was removed and the sun terrace constructed, a small oriental-style water garden constructed to the north-west of the small garden pond and the drive and terrace repaired with concrete. It is unclear when the east parterre was lost.

Since the 1960s the small garden pond has been filled in, and a new garden created around it, the large pond in the south-west deteriorated to little more than an area of marshy ground and the golden yew topiaries on the north front of the forecourt grown out into simple spheres.

Sources

Primary

The Bodfach Papers, National Library of Wales
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(1992), p.3
1848 tithe map, National Library of Wales.
Sale Particulars, 1838, National Library of Wales.

Secondary

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13 (1880) p. 9.
Griffiths, W. A., 'The Kyffin family and Llanfyllin', The Montgomeryshire
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Haslam, R., The Buildings of Powys (1979), p. 134
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Griffiths watercolour included on p. 5).
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'History of Bodfach Hall', leaflet.