

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

SITE DOSSIER

SITE NAME Wyndcliffe Court

REF. NO. PGW (Gt) 4

OS MAP 162 GRID REF. ST 518973

FORMER COUNTY Gwent UNITARY AUTHORITY Monmouth B.C. COMMUNITY
COUNCIL St. Arvans

DESIGNATIONS Listed building: Grade

National Park AONB SSSI NNR ESA GAM SAM CA

SITE EVALUATION Grade II*

Primary reasons for grading

Unaltered and well preserved Avray Tipping/Eric Francis Arts-and-Crafts garden layout in fine position.

TYPE OF SITE

1920s Arts-and-Crafts formal terraced garden with small wild garden beyond, designed by H. Avray Tipping in conjunction with Eric Francis, architect of the house, and Charles Clay, the owner.

MAIN PHASES OF CONSTRUCTION

1920s

VISITED BY/DATE Elisabeth Whittle/June 1990

HOUSE

Name Wyndcliffe Court

Grid ref. ST 518973

Date/style 1922. Vernacular/arts-and-crafts

Brief description: main building periods, architects, style, present state

A large stone house, with Cotswold stone roof, built in a vernacular/arts-and-crafts style by a local architect, Eric Francis, in 1922. Francis was heavily influenced by and collaborated with H. Avray Tipping (see also Mathern Palace, Mouton House and High Glanau, all in Gwent). The house stands on high ground, facing south, with magnificent views southwards over the coastal plain and the Bristol Channel. The main entrance is on the N side. The garden is laid out below it on the S side.

The house is in good condition, and is the private home of the owners.

OUTBUILDINGS

Name Garden cottage

Grid ref ST 519973

Date/style, and brief description

Single storey building of stone with a stone slate roof, to the E of the house, on the N side of the drive. Same style and date as house, also by Eric Francis.

THE PLEASURE GARDEN

Grid ref ST 518973

Date/style 1920s/Lutyens/Arts-and-Crafts, formal

GENERAL DESCRIPTION AND LAYOUT

The house is situated on a high bluff on the west side of the Wye valley. The ground drops steeply below it to the south down to the coastal plain. It is approached from the east by a lane lined by iron park railings. This used to be the private drive. The present drive, near the house, is lined by three pairs of mature cypresses. The drive passes the stable cottage (on the right-hand side) and enters the oval forecourt on the north side of the house. To the north of the forecourt is an area of mixed woodland, planted by Christopher Clay before the house was built.

The garden is laid out on the slope to the south of the house, with magnificent views beyond the garden to the coastal plain and Severn estuary. Its core is formal, with a wide stone-paved terrace running the full length of the house, with a stone pergola at its eastern end. Below are steps leading to a lower terrace and a sunken garden, in the middle of which is a small pool. In the south-west corner of the sunken garden is a square stone summerhouse, with an open upper floor with views southwards down a long grass walk flanked by yew hedging, and beyond the garden over the coastal plain and Severn estuary. The summerhouse stands in the corner of a high revetment wall, and its lower floor was formerly used as a mushroom house. Below the lower terrace south of the house is a long bowling green bordered by clipped yew hedges and topiary running the length of the garden. It terminates at the east end in a circular area. Levels are cleverly linked by steps and features such as the summerhouse. There is much clipped yew hedging dividing the compartments of the garden. Yew topiary is also a feature. To the west of the upper terrace a wide path leads to the entrance to the walled kitchen garden. Further from the house, to the south, is a carefully planted wild area of trees and shrubs, with a winding water channel linking two informal pools (now derelict) hidden in the trees.

STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

Drive

The drive approaches the house from the E. It is straight, and leads up to the forecourt on the N side of the house. The drive formerly extended further eastwards, but most of its length has been converted into a public road.

Forecourt

A level gravelled oval area at the end of the drive, in front of the main entrance to the house. Backed by a retaining wall on N, with central steps up to slope behind. Lower wall either side of continuation of drive on W side.

Terraces

To the S of the house is a stone-flagged terrace, 3-4 m. wide, running the full length of the house. At the E end the terrace continues past the house as an enclosed area surrounded by a stone pergola.

Two sets of steps lead down to a lower terrace of stone flags, grass and flowerbeds, with steps down to the long levelled bowling green (grass). This runs E-W, and is slightly longer than the terraces. It is rectangular, with a circular E end. To its E is a grass slope leading to two grassed-over tennis courts. Below the top terrace, to the SW, is a rectangular sunken garden on three levels, with a small rectangular lawn in the middle surrounded by two narrow terraces. On the S and W sides this garden is high above the adjacent ground, and is edged by retaining walls.

BUILT COMPONENTS

On the N side of the house the oval forecourt is edged by a stone wall topped by coping flags. In the centre of the N side there are wide steps leading up to the wooded area beyond.

The top terrace on the S side is bounded by a low stone wall topped by coping flags. The central section is higher, with balustrading and ball finials at either end. Towards the E end of the house is an open loggia raised two steps above the terrace. At the E end of the terrace is a partly-paved rectangular extension of the terrace with a stone pergola on the S, E and part of the W side. The pillars are square-sectioned, with a low wall between them, except on the W side, and are joined at the top by a ridged stone-tiled beam. There are exits on the N, S and E sides. On the E side a pair of wrought-iron gates leads to a wooded area; on the S side a gap in the wall leads to a stone path and steps down through a heather garden to the bowling green.

At the W end of the terrace there are steps down to a gravel path leading to the kitchen garden. On its N side this is backed by a low revetment wall. At either end of the terrace in front of the house are wide shallow steps down to an intermediate level which contains a circular pool set into the terrace retaining wall. This has a curving roof and dolphin-shaped dripping spout on the keystone. Steps lead down from this level to the lower terrace. This has a low revetment wall and is flagged in part, with grass and rectilinear beds with raised stone edgings arranged symmetrically either side of the central path. Further central steps, with ball finials on low piers on either side, lead down to the bowling green.

Opposite these steps, on the S side of the bowling green, are circular steps (6) with low piers on either side, leading down to the wild area.

To the S of the pergola at the E end of the terrace, reached from the bowling green, is a small circular area known as the 'sun trap'. This is stone revetted, set into the slope, with three steps down to the bowling green.

The sunken garden and summerhouse

To the SW of the house, reached from a small lawn at the W end of the lower terrace, or from the gravel path to the kitchen garden, is the rectangular sunken garden. This descends, by two narrow stone-revetted terraces, to a rectangular lawn in the middle of which is a stone-lined pool, c. 3.5 x 2 m. This is rectangular with bayed ends, and has a small statue in the middle of its W end. There are two sets of narrow steps with low square piers on either side in the middle of the E and W sides.

The garden is edged on the S side by a low wall, and on the W by a higher wall which is an extension of the E wall of the kitchen garden.

In the SW corner is a square stone summerhouse. It is two-storey, with a pitched stone roof. The sunken garden is on the level of the upper storey, with arched entrances in the middle of the E and N sides, with small rectangular windows on either side. The W and S sides are open, with a low wall and square stone piers dividing the walls into three 'windows' on each side. The view on the S side is straight down a clipped yew walk. The floor is stone flagged, and there is an ancient wooden bench inside. The ground floor is reached by narrow steps next to the wall to the N of the summerhouse, and its entrance is an arched doorway on the S side. There are no windows. In the inner part is a purpose-built mushroom house, with raised stone platforms.

To the E and N of the summerhouse are short stretches of pergola attached to it, that to the E on the retaining wall of the garden, with a wooden beam (rotten) on top, and that on the N over the exit to narrow steps leading down to the lower level below. This part has a pitched stone top.

Water feature in wild garden

In the trees on the E edge of the sloping lawn below the W end of the bowling green are a series of informal stone-edged pools. These are of irregular shape, with winding rills between them. The rill continues through the trees down past the S end of the clipped yew walk, ending in a larger, crescent-shaped pool (concrete lined) on the edge of the garden. (It now has a large fallen pine tree lying across it.) These pools and rills are more or less derelict at present, but do fill up with water in a wet season.

ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENTS

Beds on the terraces have raised stone edgings.

Sundial

In the middle of the lawn at the E end of the lower terrace is a stone sundial.

Statue on edge of pool in sunken garden

At the W end of the pool is a small statue of a girl holding a water carrier, appearing to pour water into the pool.

Bench

In the summerhouse is a wooden bench coeval with the making of the garden. It is slightly rotten in places, but is of a very pleasing flowing shape, with a small heart-shaped hole in the middle of the back.

Wrought-iron gates

There is a pair of wrought-iron gates at the E end of the pergola at the E end of the upper terrace. The E and W entrances to the kitchen garden are both closed by wrought-iron gates, the E one, nearest the house, being the grander and more elaborate.

PLANTED COMPONENTS

The perimeter of the garden is planted with mixed deciduous and coniferous trees for shelter (for instance Norway spruce, copper beech, oak). Three pairs of cypresses line the entrance drive. A pair of golden cypresses flank the steps up to the wild area to the north of the forecourt.

Within the garden the main planted components are lawns and yew hedging and topiary. There is little planting on the upper terrace. Of note is an old *Magnolia grandiflora* against the house. On the terrace below there is a *Vitis coignetiae* against the wall, and water lilies in the circular pool. Circular yew topiary flanks the central path to the bowling green, with further topiary (see plan) on the lower terrace, which is divided into areas of lawn and formal flowerbeds. Yew hedges form its E and W boundaries. To the E is a sloping heather garden.

The bowling green is a long lawn edged on all but its N side by yew hedging clipped vertically and horizontally. At regular intervals along the straight sides there are slightly wider and higher 'piers' with ball 'finials'. The circular E end is plain, with two ball 'finials' either side of the central gap.

To the W of the upper terrace the path to the kitchen garden is lined with herbaceous borders. The sunken garden terraces are planted with low-growing shrubs and herbaceous plants, and a Russian vine partly covers the summerhouse.

To the S of the summerhouse, leading almost to the edge of the garden, is a grass walk c. 50 m. long lined by clipped yew hedges. These are clipped vertically and horizontally, with 'battlemented' tops. There is a sloping grass lawn to the E, bounded by trees.

To the W is an area of lawn and isolated shrubs (recently planted, replacing formal beds) near the kitchen garden, with woodland further S. The wild garden to the S of the bowling green is planted with mixed shrubs (for instance azaleas, viburnums, cotoneasters), with trees beyond.

ESSENTIAL SETTING AND VIEWS BEYOND THE SITE

View from the top terrace S across the coastal plain to the Bristol Channel and beyond (from point A on map).

ANY SPECIAL FEATURES

Iron railings either side of the road leading to the house from the E. These indicate that this was originally part of the private drive.

UTILITARIAN GARDENS

NAME Kitchen garden

Grid ref ST 517973

Date/style 1920s/utilitarian

DESCRIPTION (categories as for the pleasure garden)

A large rectangular walled kitchen garden. Walls in good condition. Main entrance from pleasure garden in centre of E side, with elaborate wrought-iron gates flanked by tall stone piers with ball finials. Central gravel path running E-W from this entrance to a similar but smaller and simpler one on W leading to boundary woodland (Scots pines, larches etc.). There is a small round-headed doorway at the N end of the E side now half blocked by stonework. There are two further small entrances near the E end of the N side and in the middle of the S side.

Inside is a gravel path running parallel with the walls. In the southern half is a low dry-stone revetment wall giving a slight terrace to the slope. Most of the interior is cultivated for vegetables and flowers, with some old fruit trees against the walls and some old cordon apples along the N side of the central path. There are stone edgings to the beds.

Against the N wall are two original lean-to greenhouses, of brick and woodwork, with cold frames against the E one.

SOURCES

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

Secondary

Haslam, R., 'The Houses of H. Avray Tipping I', *Country Life*, 6 December 1979, pp. 2154-57.

Haslam, R., 'The Houses of H. Avray Tipping II', *Country Life*, 13 December 1979, pp. 2270-73.

To be appended: 1:10,000 map of site, marked with boundaries, viewpoints etc.; colour photographs of site, photocopies of relevant material, where available. _____