

GLIFFAES

Ref No	PGW(Po) 4 (POW)
OS Map	161
Grid Ref	SO 171199
Former County	Powys
Unitary Authority	Powys
District	Brecknock
Community Council	Llanfihangel Cwmdu with Bwlch and Cathedine
Designations	Listed Building: House Grade II. National Park: Brecon Beacons.
Site Evaluation	Grade II*
Primary reasons for grading	Small nineteenth-century estate with exceptional arboricultural interest and later formal garden addition in an extremely picturesque setting.
Type of Site	Italianate house set in formal grounds; walled kitchen garden; wooded pleasure grounds.
Main Phases of Construction	c. early nineteenth-century and c. 1883 on.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Gliffaes stands in the shelter of Myarth hill, facing south and east, on a retained terrace overlooking the River Usk. Below the terrace the ground drops steeply to the river's flood plain. On the opposite side of the river the land rises steeply again, enclosing the site in a narrow river valley. Access to the site is via a long drive that curves around the hill from the north-east through the Glanusk Estate.

A modestly sized house, the present Gliffaes which replaced an earlier, stone farm house, is styled in an Italianate manner, accentuated by steep, Lombard brick campaniles on the south-west and north-east corners. It is a two-storeyed house of local stone with red brick detail. The house was built in about 1883-85 for the Rev. W. West who had spent time in Italy. No architect is known, but it is suggested that Lugar could have been involved, drawing up designs for the Gliffaes site while he was working on neighbouring Glanusk Park for Joseph Bailey from 1825. In 1903 a portecochere was added to the main entrance on the north side of the house by an unknown

architect. The most recent addition came in about 1988 when a sensitive dining room extension was erected on the south-west corner of the house.

A stone paved terrace surrounds the house on the west, south and east. A large modern conservatory on the south front connects the house with the wider south terrace.

The site has early origins; the first reference to it appears in 1234. The site passed into the Beaufort Estates and became a tenanted farm called Gwlydd Vaes, 'the dewy field'. Tenants from 1705 to about 1780 are recorded. It would seem that the last tenant was a Thomas James in the early nineteenth century who was followed by the first owner-occupier Mr William H. West, a man of social standing and industrial wealth, with interests in the Beaufort iron foundries, who became High Sheriff of the County in 1833. It was this Mr West who began the gardens, planting and propagating rare and unusual trees and who increased the estate by forty acres following the Enclosures Act of 1845, which enabled the Baileys of Glanusk to take over the surrounding common lands. West's son, the Rev. West, who built the present house, lost the family money and by 1895 had let the property to Sir Shirley Salt, son of Titus Salt of Saltaire Mill, Bradford, who finally bought the site in 1903. Shirley Salt married into the Bailey family and, in effect, the site was incorporated into the Glanusk estate until 1919 when it was sold on. Between 1919 to 1948 the property passed through several hands, opening first as a hotel in about 1936. The present owner's parents took over in 1948, originally in a partnership, but assumed full ownership by the early 1970s.

The first known house on the site, the old Gliffaes lies about 30m north of the present house. It is believed that this was the earlier tenant farmhouse of Gwlydd Vaes, modified and extended by Mr W. H. West in the early nineteenth-century. Of local stone, the house is a long, low, two-storeyed range in the local vernacular style, stone roof tiles having given way to slate. A photograph of about 1870 records an ivy clad south front looking out on to a lawn with a drive curving around to the house front from the west. After the erection of the main house the old house became stables, later garages, and staff accommodation. It remained as such until about 1972 when the present owners converted it into a private house for themselves.

There is no formal parkland at Gliffaes, a more appropriate description of the site would be farmland developed into wooded pleasure grounds. However, land to the west of the site, lying within the site's historical boundary, could have been considered to be simple parkland - some ornamental plantings, conifers and oak, appear to survive within it.

The 1905 Ordnance Survey map confusingly marks the field immediately below the south garden boundary of the site as park. At the time, as today, this land was within the ownership of Glanusk and was probably part of the Penmyarth estate that was absorbed into that of Glanusk. Planting around Myarth hill, especially redwoods planted along the north side of the road between Gliffaes and Penmyarth, still illustrate this link. However, by 1934 this field had temporarily passed into the

ownership of Gliffaes, the 1934 Sale Catalogue recording it as a small golf course. It is presumed that Glanus bought the land back at this time.

It would seem from the tithe map of 1840, and from the Beaufort rent accounts, that Gliffaes was a modest tenanted farm. The buildings recorded on site were the old house at Gliffaes and the cottages to the north-east, which lie outside the site boundary. As the first owner occupier, Mr W. H. West, was at liberty to ornament the grounds and created pleasure grounds in what were fields.

The gardens at Gliffaes, which cover approximately 4 acres, surround the house on south sloping ground to the east and west, with walks descending to the river in the south-east.

The drive reaches the site from the east, running along a raised terrace between banks of hybrid, grafted rhododendrons and tree planted lawns. North of the drive the ground rises steeply towards Myarth Hill. This area is semi-wooded, many ornamentals being planted in what is presently a hay meadow. The drive runs along a terrace above the house and about 12m before the main courtyard turns south-west towards it. At this point the south side of the drive is divided from the lawn beyond by an extended rock garden of large stones planted up with heathers, acers and other ornamentals. To the north of the drive there appears to be an abandoned area of wild garden.

The courtyard, a small square area, is enclosed on the north and east by a low stone wall containing steps, leading down to the service drive below, and a ornamental dipping pool. To the south and west, the courtyard is enclosed by the house and the porte-cochere. In the south-east corner of the courtyard two wide stone steps ascend on to a stone paved terrace which continues along the length of the east front of the house. This terrace is approximately 2m wide and is separated from the house by a flower border. At the north and south end of the terrace two separate sets of three stone steps descend on to a wide grass terrace lawn, the first of a series of three descending to the east. The northern steps are defined by two low stone piers, one of which supports a lead putti. The southern steps descend on to a wide, hard core path which proceeds in a easterly direction along the length of the first two terraces, descending to the second by way of a second set of four small stone steps. This arrangement, except for the presence of a path, is mirrored on the north side of the terrace.

Along the eastern edge of the house terrace there are simple flower beds planted up with heathers and ferns. In the centre of the first terrace there is a rectangular rose bed, lying on a west/east line and, adjacent to the second steps, a mature acer threatens to overrun the path.

Five stone steps, on both the north and south sides, connect the second and third terraces. The third terrace is a level lawn, once the site of a double grass tennis court. Rustic, semi-circular stone steps east of this terrace descend to an area of approximately 1/4 acre in the centre of which is a large, square sunken pond approximately 10m wide. At the time of recording this pond was dry.

In the south-east corner of the third terrace there is a switch-back flight of narrow stone steps descending to the 'Fisherman's Walk'. This tree lined walk descends down the hill side to the south-east to a timber fishing hut on the banks of the River Usk. Approximately 10m north-west of the hut a path runs back towards the house on a lower level, joining up with an access to the southern terrace. About 6m along this path, immediately to the south, there is a redundant trout hatchery. North-east of the hut a second path ascends through ornamental woodland and finally emerges, up a flight of steep stone steps, on to the drive opposite the Lodge. Behind the Lodge to the west a path leads north-west through a hay meadow towards the summit of the hill. This path is designed to run beneath the ornamental trees planted in this area and to give views out over the site and the countryside beyond. This path returns either to the main house entrance by way of a foot gate, which leads to the drive prior to the staff car park (see below), or continues in a curve up to the north-west and then to the south-east, running above the old house and kitchen garden, leading to the garden proper via a farm gate at its most westerly extent. The extensive kitchen garden and service area lie to the west of the old house, separated from it by a small range of modern stables.

To the west of the kitchen garden on the western site boundary there is a hard tennis court, enclosed and secluded by mature surrounding trees. There is an area of rough grass between the tennis court and the kitchen garden which seems to be semi-private.

The west garden is an area of smooth lawn which undulates down a south-westerly slope, planted up with ornamental trees. An abandoned drive, now grassed over, appears to run across this area on a south-west diagonal. In the centre of the west garden there is an abandoned rock/water garden. To the east of this feature the ground rises steeply to a level plateau, enclosed by shrub planting; azaleas, philadelphus and, to the north, an enormous prostrate juniper. This area is concluded to the east by the steep, west wall of the south terrace (see below). To the north the lawn continues back to the service drive which runs both to the old house and the north-west corner of the hotel. On the south-west corner of the hotel a recent dining room extension opens on to a continuation of the southern terrace. From the north-west corner of the extension the garden is reached by a flight of circular stone steps, which are ornamented by a pair of stone bears. Approximately 4m to the west of these steps on the lawn there is a lead and stone antique bird bath, standing on a stone pedestal. New lavender beds run along underneath the south-west retaining wall, underneath the extension.

The formal rooms of the house reach the wide, stone paved south terrace, which runs the length of the south front, through a conservatory. The terrace continues around the west and east sides of the house as described above. A low stone wall with iron railing detail, runs along the southern edge of the terrace. Stone and tile bench seats with mosaic panel backs are incorporated into this wall at intervals. The terrace is high and is substantially supported underneath by a set of stone arches, which themselves contain seats, and looks out dramatically over the river below. At the west

and east ends of the arches are stone steps to the terrace above. The eastern end also connects with the west end of the Fisherman's Walk.

W. H. West is credited with establishing the garden at Gliffaes from 1819 although it would perhaps be more appropriate to describe it as an early arboretum. Theophilus Jones noted how West had 'much beautified' the site, planting 'many rare trees'. Certain trees in the grounds today, such as the Yellow Buckeye and Lucombe oak in the northern meadow would appear to date from West's time. Whether West laid out ornamental flower gardens is unknown although it is probable that some sort of productive garden would have been established.

The eastern terrace gardens are believed to be contemporary with the present house, dating from its completion in 1885. A late Victorian garden was created here with a rose garden nearest to the house, gravelled paths and large herbaceous borders. A rockery is believed to have been constructed on the site of the present stables. Fourteen gardeners are thought to have been employed at Gliffaes at this time.

Sir Shirley Salt probably augmented this garden, possibly introducing the Pacific north-west conifers. Few photographs or illustrations survive until about 1910 when photographs record the eastern garden as having retained its Victorian/Edwardian layout. At this time the rose garden was dominated by a central rose pergola. The clearest period record of the gardens comes with the 1934 Sale Catalogue which describes features associated with a pre-1920 garden; the rose pergola, a sunken rose garden with a central fountain (later the site of the pond), a rock, a bog and a terraced herb garden, hanging woodland and a small beech wood. Of these features the sites of the bog and the herb gardens have not been identified. All the other feature, except from the rose pergola, survive in some form. The 'Bamboos' to the north of the drive also survive in what appeared to be an area of wild garden. A south drive, 'Green Drive', which cut across the western garden, was still in use at this stage and is known to have been in existence from at least the mid-nineteenth century when a lodge, by Robert Lugar, was built at its western end on the Llangynidr/ Bwlch road (B4560). In 1919 a ginkgo was planted besides it at the garden boundary to celebrate a coming of age. The tennis court and small golf course, to the south of the site, are also believed to have been established by this time.

Significantly in 1934 the estate already seems to have been of horticultural note, three pages of the Sale Catalogue carefully recording the seasonal attractions of the garden, the shrubs, herbaceous perennials and bulbs. From the time of the sale the gardens seem to have gradually declined until the purchase of the site in 1948 by the Brabner family. The family's knowledge and enthusiasm, together with advice from the landscape gardener C. H. Taudevin, a family relation, allowed the site to be restored and developed. Recent work has included the resiting of the rhododendrons along the southern side of the drive, and redesigning the east terraces to make the gardens more economical in terms of labour.

The walled kitchen garden lies approximately 100m west of the house. It covers about 1 1/2 acres, lying on a west/east line and is in two sections. The garden faces

south towards the river and lies on a gentle slope, its southern boundary being terraced. A date inscribed in cement suggests that since 1963 all of the kitchen garden walls have been either rebuilt and/or significantly reduced in height. Along the southern edge of the east garden there is now no obvious wall, the terrace is retained by a low stone wall below. In the western section this wall increases in height to approximately 1m and is ornamented by square columns at regular intervals. Both west and east walls proceed up hill in a series of wide steps, only the north-west wall and north western wall reflect the original height of 2m and above. The northern wall of the east side of the garden has been lowered to approximately 1.2m and coped. It appears to have been a heated wall, although no heating apparatus survives. (or was this just the site of a glass house?) There are no formal entrances into the area. A pair of low stone walls flank a short path in the south-east corner of the east garden, which leads into the area. This path runs underneath a modern rose pergola. In the south-west corner of the west garden the exit is a farm gate. The interior of both parts of the garden are utilised for the guests; both are grassed without any paths, the east garden has a central, circular flower bed enclosed by two narrow rectangular beds and the west; a putting golf green. The east and west gardens are divided by a square, two storeyed garden building which abuts the north wall. In the west garden, a wooden door is set into the wall just to the west of the garden building. This wall also bears the only surviving evidence of the area's purpose, through the nails and training wires which remain upon it.

Immediately north of the walled kitchen garden is the site of a Frame Yard. A single aisled, brick based glass house survives, but is abandoned. To the north of this, and heavily overgrown, are the remains of a small red brick bothy, a modern glass house and two, low red brick cold frames which have lost their glass lights. The remains of a stone edged path still runs around the cold frames.

The actual date of the walled kitchen garden is unknown, but is probably contemporary with the construction of the main house in the 1880s. It is unclear if W. H. West maintained a productive garden on the site. The frame yard appears to be slightly later, of nineteenth-century date. In 1934 this area was described as having a span glasshouse, with four internal divisions, heated frames, two ranges of cold frames, a lean to vinery within the kitchen garden, a span vinery, potting, store and wood sheds and a fruit room (probably the square garden building). As with the ornamental gardens this area declined after 1934. In about 1972 the decision was taken to utilise the ground within the garden, it has been redeveloped and not restored to its original purpose.

Sources

- Primary** 1840 Tithe map, National Library of Wales
Photographs and Sales Catalogues (1934 and c. 1920), private collection and National Library of Wales.
- Secondary** Addis, J., Crickhowell Yesterday - 100 Years of Photographs (1996), vol. II. Pl. 72

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Haslam, R., The Buildings of Powys (1979), p.366

Jones, T., A History of Brecknockshire, (Glanusk edn 1909), pp. 185, 294.

Mitchell, A., Trees of Britain, (1996), p. 144